# "LOOKE YOU, THE STARRES SHINE STILL"

## SIGHT AND INSIGHT

## IN JOHN WEBSTER'S

## *THE WHITE DEVIL* AND *THE DUCHESS OF MALFI*

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# ABSTRACT

The concern of this thesis is John Webster's representation of subjectivity in his tragedies *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.* I argue that where the dominant formations of Renaissance humanism posit the male subject as an autonomous, self-dramatized identity, Webster represents him as desiring and existentially inauthentic. Where this leads to a savage repression of the other, Webster's subjects suffer an ontological crisis whose resolution can only be found in a repudiation of rational consciousness. Webster thus shows authentic being as affirmed through a reunification with the other: it is then that his characters, freed from the solipsism of egocentric subjectivity, recognize the limits of their experience and gain insight into their capacity to love.

HANS HOLBEIN THE YOUNGER

*THE AMBASSADORS*

1533

NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

# INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable expositions of the *Zeitgeist*[1] of the English Renaissance is Hans Holbein the Younger's painting *The Ambassadors*. [2] In this painting we see two life-sized ambassadors,[3] identified as Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve. [4] They are placed in an interior, secular setting in which they stand before, and either side of, a double-shelved table crowded with numerous geometrical and astronomical instruments. Where these include sundials, quadrants, celestial and terrestrial globes, the shelves also display books – one a hymn book, the other a book of arithmetic – a lute and a case of flutes. Together, these objects are clearly references to Renaissance humanist concerns; as such, they are also

1. In using this term, I am subscribing to the belief that there is a discernible unifying spirit which defines any age. The broader debate on this matter is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I do suggest that the painting expresses what are generally accepted as the predominant formations of the Renaissance period.

2 Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*, 1533. The National Gallery, London.

3 *The Ambassadors* is 207 x 209cm.

4 The year that *The Ambassadors* was painted, Jean de Dinteville was resident French ambassador in London. Georges de Selve, a close friend, was known to be visiting him. See Arthur B. Chamberlain, *Hans Holbein The Younger*, vol.2, (London: George Allen & Company Ltd, 1913) p.34-53. Hereafter cited as Chamberlain.

emblematic of the ambassadors' humanist subjectivity.[5] Stephen Greenblatt, who writes extensively on this painting in *Renaissance Self-fashioning,* notes:

> The objects ... represent a mastery of the Quadrivium, that portion of the Seven Liberal Arts comprising Music, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Astronomy, while a mastery of the Trivium – Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric – is implied by the very profession of the two figures. They are thus in possession of the instruments – both literal and symbolic – by which men bring the world into focus, represent it in proper perspective. Indeed, in addition to their significance as emblems of the Liberal Arts, the objects on the table virtually constitute a series of textbook illustrations for a manual on the art of perspective. [6]

Greenblatt's reference to perspective is important, since one of the most powerful influences on the shaping of humanist subjectivity in the

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5 The term "humanism" is problematic. For many in the latter part of the twentieth-century, 'humanism' is concomitant with atheism. But though I note the secular concerns of the setting of the painting, it is inappropriate to attribute the twentieth-century meaning to the period in question, which is a thoroughly religious one. Rather, I use the term in the sense of what it has come to mean in "traditional" readings of the Renaissance. As Kate Soper points out, this a concept whose interpretation varies. Whilst largely ignored in what she terms "mainstream Anglo-American philosophy", its usage is commonplace in continental theory (in particular French theory) where it is seen as an ideological construct produced by systems of thought at a given historical moment. What is therefore under attack by "anti-humanism" is described by her as its positive appeal "to the notion of a core humanity or common essential features in terms of which human beings can be defined and understood, thus (negatively) to concepts ('alienation', 'inauthenticity', 'reification', etc.) designating, and intended to explain, the perversion or 'loss' of this common being. Humanism takes history to be a product of human thought and action, and thus claims that the categories of 'consciousness', 'agency', 'choice', 'responsibility', 'moral value' etc. are indispensable to its understanding". See Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism.* (London: Hutchinson and Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1986) pp.11-12.

6 Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,1980) p.17. Hereafter cited as Greenblatt, 1980.

Renaissance was Alberti's rediscovery of linear perspective.[7] Where the individual formerly experienced a reflexive connection with the world, he was now placed centrally as the egocentric, isolated viewer for whom the world "out there" became desacralized and exploitable. Describing the impact of linear perspective on vision, Martin Jay says that

> the medieval assumption of multiple vantage points from which a scene could be painted, which at times meant no real vantage point at all, was replaced by one sovereign eye ... [N]ow the participatory moment in *theoria*, the specular intertwining of likenesses in viewer and viewed, was lost as the spectator withdrew entirely from the seen (the scene), separated from it by Alberti's shatterproof window. 8

Indeed, unlike most of Holbein's subjects whose eyes are either downcast or averted,[9] Georges de Selve and Jean de Dinteville appear to be sustained by the instruments which are emblematic of this new way of seeing. If they gaze out from the canvas with the calm self-awareness of men who believe themselves to be in control of their universe, they also look towards the Enlightenment.

There is, however, a studied quality about the way in which the ambassadors self-consciously submit themselves to the viewer's gaze: as

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7 This is also Yi-Fu Tuan's thesis. See *Segmented Worlds and Self: Group Life and Individual Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). Hereafter cited as Tuan. See also Martin Jay, "The Noblest of the Senses: Vision from Plato to Descartes", *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) p. 21-82. Hereafter cited as Jay.

8 Jay, p. 54-5.

9 See Chamberlain.

if to mirror each other's pose, both lean their inside elbows on the upper shelf behind them, and where de Selve holds his gown close with his outside hand, de Dinteville's right hand rests languorously upon a gold-tassled dagger. And if de Dinteville is the more visually splendid of the two, he also projects the aplomb of an experienced actor: dressed in his fashionably slashed pink doublet, massively sleeved black surcoat lined with ermine, and adorned with his regalia of office, he, in effect, upstages his relatively sombre companion. Thus, inasmuch as Holbein's subjects are representatives of Renaissance humanist subjectivity, they are also actors appearing before their audience; the emblems of their Renaissance humanism become their props, and the curtain behind them their hanging or backdrop.

Although the representation of life as a drama in which individuals play their ascribed roles – the *theatrum mundi* tradition – existed long before the period in question and can be traced to its ultimate source in Stoicism, it held particular appeal during the Renaissance. Indeed, in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico della Mirandola posited man's freedom to play any part he chose and from any fixed place in the chain of being, as divinely sanctioned. God himself tells Adam that

> [w]e have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with the freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power, out of the soul's judgement, to be reborn into the highest forms, which are divine.[10]

10 See Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Sir Walter Ralegh and the Dramatic Sense of Life: The Renaissance Man and His Roles* (London: Yale University Press, 1973) p. 32. Hereafter cited as Greenblatt, 1973.

Similarly, Machiavelli, albeit from a secular and utilitarian perspective, saw the Renaissance prince as "a great pretender and dissembler".[11] But the most powerful influence upon the Renaissance notion that subjectivity was achieved through self-dramatization was Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*.[12] As Greenblatt states:

> *The Courtier* is ... a fable about man as actor. The figure of [Castiglione's] ideal courtier ... is a role for a consummate performer, an actor who can transform the ugly and ragged conflicts of reality into a harmonious work of art.[13]

Indeed, where the ambassadors appear as costumed actors, the painting is remarkably reflexive; as humanist subjects who "transform ... the conflicts of reality", the ambassadors are, in a real sense, a work of art.

Yet if Holbein's painting is a celebration of humanist subjectivity, it is one disturbed by strange juxtapositions and undeniably disruptive elements. The most obvious of these is the anamorphic skull which sheers across the space between the ambassadors' feet: the tangential angle of its placing, and its organic indeterminacy are at odds with the geometrical symmetry of the patterned mosaic floor, [14] and the tangibility of the

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11 Nicolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1993) p.138. Hereafter cited as Machiavelli.

12 The first publication of *Il Cortegiano* was in 1528. Its impact in England was fostered by its translation into English by Sir Thomas Hoby in four editions: 1561, 1577, 1588 and 1603. Other translations were those of Robert Peterson in 1576 and George Pettie and Bartholomew Young in 1581-86. See Hollander and Kermode, eds., *The Literature of Renaissance England* (London: Oxford University Press) p.84-5. Hereafter cited as Hollander and Kermode.

13 Greenblatt, 1973, p. 34.

14 It is interesting to note that this pattern is a reproduction of the floor of the Sanctuary of Westminster Abbey. See Chamberlain, p. 50.

scientific instruments on the table. By its size, distortion, and strange positioning, it is clearly more than a conventional *memento mori.* Less immediately obvious, but also disruptive, is the broken string on the lute which rests on the lower shelf. And also disruptive – given that both ambassadors were Catholic[15] – is the opened hymn book revealing Luther's translation of "Veni Creator Spiritus". Also disturbing is the placing of the instruments: positioned as they are in the space between the ambassadors, they have the effect of distancing one man from the other, and where de Selve's face is level with a cylindrical sundial which seems almost mirror-like to reflect its oval shape, the effect is to give him not so much an expression of "calculated impenetrability"[16] as Greenblatt describes it, but to remove expression entirely. Consequently, both men's faces seem mask-like. Furthermore, there is a marked contrast between the pattern on the Turkish rug draped across the table and that on the curtain behind it: where the former's pattern, in red, black and grey, is precise, the latter's, in monochromatic green, is foliate and naturalistic. What is most remarkable, however, is that this curtain, or backdrop, is not quite drawn, and thus, what would otherwise have been obscured from view is partially exposed: bisected by the curtain's fold is a tiny silver crucifix.

Of *The Ambassadors,* Charles McCorquodale comments: "[its] extremely complex symbolism still eludes complete explanation ... The skull seems to indicate that the picture is a sort of *memento mori*: the

15 Chamberlain, p. 41.

16 Greenblatt, *1980.* p. 20.

broken lute signifies a v*anitas* theme."[17] Other commentators are less equivocal, however. Greenblatt suggests that the disturbing elements of the painting are "a subtle but powerful countercurrent to the forces of harmony, reconciliation, and confident intellectual achievement embodied elsewhere in the picture's objects and fixtures".[18] He also points out that "we must distort and, in essence, efface the figures in order to see the skull".[19] Similarly, in *The Ambassadors*, Jacques Lacan saw effacement of the subject; in Martin Jay's words:

> In *The Ambassadors* ... the dominant Cartesian perspectivalist scopic regime ... was challenged by another, which was expressed by the distorted skull at the bottom of the canvas, a skull whose natural shape could be restored only by an oblique glance from the painting's edge. Such an object ... suggested the desire of the Symbolic realm in which the subjected is decentered, split, and comes to terms with its own incompleteness". [20]

Lacan's theories of vision and their relationship to his anti-humanist view of subjectivity are too complex to pursue here;[21] but his defining of "normal" perspective as "correspond[ing] to the Cartesian subject's geometrical mapping of space"[22] both recapitulates the influence on subjectivity which predates the picture and reminds us that humanist

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17 Charles McCorquodale, *The Renaissance: European Painting 1400-1600* (London: Studio Editions Ltd., 1994) p. 178. Hereafter cited as McCorquodale.

18 Greenblatt, 1980. pp 18-19.

19 Ibid., p.20.

20 Jay, p. 363.

21 For a detailed account see Jay, chapter 6: "Lacan, Althusser, and the Specular subject of Ideology", pp. 329-380.

22 Jay, p. 363.

subjectivity led to that most cataclysmic shift in Western consciousness, the Cartesian *cogito*.[23] That was the moment when, as Dollimore puts it, "the metaphysically derivative soul [gave] way to the autonomous individuated essence, the self-affirming consciousness".[24]

Hence, if the symbolism which puzzles McCorquodale is evidence of one way of seeing challenging another, it can also be seen to record the conflict between two modes of consciousness. Thus *The Ambassadors* records what Debora Shuger describes as "[the] central tension in Renaissance habits of thought ... [which] plays itself out between the polarities of participatory and rational consciousness". [25] The painting records a shift in consciousness whereby the cosmic view of the world with its collapsible boundaries between words, things, nature and supernature, and its multiple vantage points which intertwine the viewer and the viewed in a subject/object fusion,[26] gives way to a consciousness in which boundaries are firmly drawn by "Cartesian" vision, things are stripped of numinosity and valued for function, thought is compartmentalized, and the unity of art and science is sundered. But what is also noteworthy in the painting is absence: in this particular milieu dominated by the

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23 Of Descartes's *cogito*, Cassirer says that "With one blow ... the mind rejects the whole of the past and must now go along the new path towards thoughtful reflection upon itself ... the significance of this revolution is by no means lessened if we trace the development and the steady growth of the intellectual and the general forces which finally gave it birth". Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy,* trans. Mario Domandi, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963) p. 123. Hereafter cited as Cassirer.

24 Jonathon Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1984) p. 254.

25 Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p.44. Hereafter cited as Shuger, 1990.

26 For an interesting account of participatory consciousness and its relation to vision and the environment, see Tuan, chapter 6, "Ambience and Sight", pp. 114-136.

patriarchal concerns of Renaissance humanism, there is no place for woman or nature. [27]

For an insight into the strange juxtapositions and presences in *The Ambassadors,* however, it is to Richard Tarnas's summation of the formation of Western humanist subjectivity that I now turn. Tarnas states:

> The "man" of Western tradition has been a questing masculine hero, a Promethean biological and metaphysical rebel who has constantly sought freedom and progress for himself, and who has thus constantly striven to differentiate himself from and control the matrix out of which he emerged ... The fundamental religious, scientific, and philosophical perspectives of Western culture have all been affected by this decisive masculinity ... [which has] served the cause of evolving the autonomous human will and intellect: the transcendent self, the independent individual ego, the self-determining human being in its uniqueness, separateness, and freedom. But ... the Western mind has been founded on ... the repression of the feminine – on the repression of undifferentiated unitary consciousness, of the *participation mystique* with nature: a progressive denial of the *anima mundi* ... of the community of being, of the all-pervading, of mystery and ambiguity, of imagination, emotion, instinct, body, nature, woman – of all which the masculine mind has projectively identified as "other". [28]

When seen in the light of these comments, the green, foliate curtain in *The*

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27 Of course women were subjects in Holbein's paintings, as portraits of Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves and Lady Margaret Butts (and others) indicate. The point I make is supported by the fact that women are an importance presence in earlier Italian Renaissance paintings, not as subjects, but as part of the expression of the Neoplatonic *anima mundi*. An example of this is Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (1484-6). See McCorquodale p.118.

28 Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993) pp.441-2. Hereafter cited as Tarnas.

*Ambassadors* becomes a reference to this exclusion of the other, and an artistic representation of nature at odds with the masculine emblems of rational consciousness etched against it. Moreover, the centrally placed Lutheran hymn book becomes allusive to Protestantism's privileging of the word and, concomitantly, the eclipse of the crucifix an allusion to the rejection of iconolatry and the notion of spiritual intermediaries. Thus the latter also reveals the repudiation of participatory consciousness which, in Shuger's words "assumes the primacy of desire in the act of knowing ... [and] does not oppose psyche and world".[29] And whereas the lute and the skull, in a conventional sense, warn of the transitory nature of human existence, they also show, when viewed in terms of Tarnas's thesis, the hubristic repression of the other as revealed in, respectively, creativity and death. If the subjects' faces are masklike, this is because they are as aesthetically objectified as the objects around them; they are more lifeless than the organic form at their feet.[30]

Having interpreted *The Ambassadors* thus, I now turn to the concern of this thesis: John Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.* In answer to the question, "What is the relevance of *The Ambassadors* to these plays? ", I suggest that Holbein shows pictorially what Webster reveals even more powerfully in dramatic form: that where Holbein's *The Ambassadors* is the site of uneasy juxtapositions, discords and anamorphic configurations, it is prefigurative of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.* Just as *The Ambassadors* interrogates humanist subjectivity in relation to the tension between the participatory and

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29 Shuger, 1990. p. 45.

30 That sixteenth-century portraiture represents the sitter as still-life is the view of Roy Strong. See *The English Icon* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969).

rational modes of consciousness, so, in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi,* that tension is revealed in the savage repression and destruction of "the *anima mundi* ... mystery and ambiguity ... imagination, emotion, instinct, body [and] nature" as embodied in woman. But in addition, like *The Ambassadors*, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are, as art, self-referential; they interrogate the privileging of the ocular, the nature of appearances and consequently, their own art.

Where *The Ambassadors* hints at the metaphor of life as drama, Webster's tragedies are full of theatrical imagery: in the *theatrum mundi* tradition, they not only critique the chameleon role-player, but also draw attention to the artifice of the mimetic process itself. Hence, if *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* provide evidence for what Shuger cites as Chrysostom's view of the *theatrum mundi* tradition as "inherently subversive [since it] interrogat[es] the very order it dramatizes simply by dramatizing it", [31] it is because Webster does not support the status quo, he attacks it. In showing the protean powers of Pico della Mirandola's divinely free man as extinguished by the stronger claims of desire, Webster reveals the ontological crisis of the subject in conflict with, and alienated, from himself.

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31 See Debora K. Shuger, "Subversive fathers and suffering subjects: Shakespeare and Christianity", *Religion, Literature, and Politics in Post-Reformation England, 1540-1688,* eds. Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.48. Although Shuger takes issue with critics of Shakespeare who argue that "the canon is an elitist, reactionary construct [since they] have ... tended to bypass or subvert any religious content of the plays in order to reclaim their authority for more radical, politicized, skeptical – and therefore more congenial – allegiances" (46), I believe it applies equally to Webster. As she also states: "this division between Christian and radical is incorrect, and furthermore, precisely those moments in Shakespeare identified by modern critics as radical and subversive derive ... from traditions of Christian radicalism, traditions not rooted in popular heterodoxy but in fact characteristic of the Church Fathers, particularly the Greek Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries ... [D]uring the Renaissance, a primary role of the canon, however unintentional, was not to reproduce official ideology but rather to authorise and transmit subversion" (51).

In *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi,* Webster posits Renaissance humanist subjectivity as an ideological fabrication which obliterates authentic being. Insofar as his characters are pluralized and discontinuous, they function dialectically, but where their repressed desire is unleashed in violence, cruelty and sadism, Webster reveals a psychological insight which is proto-Freudian.[32] Thus, if *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* offer an anti-humanist reading that man's subjectivity is "challenged" or "effaced", it should be remembered that, in the late Renaissance, the bifurcation of philosophy and theology had yet to occur. Hence man in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* cannot be seen as "dead" from a post-Nietzschean perspective, but rather, through a lens coloured by Webster's theological beliefs. Accordingly, the Renaissance subject is annihilated by the denial of his metaphysical essence: Renaissance humanism's assertion of the self-fashioned, or self-*dramatized* identity is, for Webster, a solipsistic turning away from God. In this, his Platonic-Augustinian bias is apparent: Webster's is not a Manichean universe but one in which evil is the result of individuals' misdirected desire.[33] Where a materialist view of human nature denies the metaphysical soul as the essence of being, it also denies the individual's authentic, passionate yearning for plenitude; the turning away from his *telo*s – union with God – is also his alienation from the other, and

32 Joseph Mazzeo suggests that although the Medieval/Aristotelian placement of man on the hierarchical ladder above animals and below angels lacks scientific validity, it symbolizes "a profound psychological truth about him which we have recovered ... with the new model of the mind furmished by depth psychology. Man is ... a paradoxical creature who is a fusion of potentially warring principles, reason and biological drives, animality and spirituality, atavistic impulses and imperfectly realized restraints". See *Renaissance and Revolution: The Remaking of European Thought* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1967) p. 174.

33 See Frederick Copleston, S.J., "St. Augustine", chapters III-VII, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. II (New York: Doubleday, 1985) pp.51-90. Hereafter cited as Copleston.

himself.[34]

If, in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi,* Webster posits an innate knowledge of objective truth, it is accessible only through participatory consciousness, or a reunification with the other. Only when individuals transcend the ego and rationality breaks down are they receptive to the spiritual dimension of the universe and *caritas* – God's unconditional love. [35] Then, Webster suggests, the individual experiences authentic being. To use Holbein's *The Ambassadors* metaphorically, it is when the viewer shifts his or her gaze from the central viewing position – thus effacing the symbols of rationalism – that the death's head, or the other of "mystery ... ambiguity ... imagination, emotion, instinct, body [and] nature", [36] is restored to plenitude.

Yet another reason for my introducing this thesis with reference to Holbein's *The Ambassadors* is my support for Webster's belief in art as an intermediary which negotiates the gulf between the rational and participatory modes of consciousness. [37] Where *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* are strewn with shifts in perspective, strange disjunctions and conflicting arenas of action which co-exist and vie for the audience's visual attention, they challenge Cartesian linear vision. But more than

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34 Webster critiques Renaissance humanist subjectivity as a *male* prerogative. For the purposes of this thesis I therefore use the masculine pronoun when it seems appropriate to do so.

35 Again, Webster's Platonic-Augustinian bias is apparent. See Irving Singer, "Eros the Mystical Ascent", pp. 162-197, *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Hereafter cited as Singer.

36 Tarnas, p. 442.

37 As Shuger points out the copresence of rational and non-rational consciousness "characterizes Western culture from very early on – perhaps to some extent, all cultures". See Shuger, 1990, p. 21. See also Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XXI (1927-31) (Toronto: The Hogarth Press Ltd. 1961) pp.64-145.

that, they draw attention to the limits of knowledge based on sensory perception. Thus Webster's tragedies function as an aid to seeing Platonically: it is not with, but *through* the eyes that intransitory universals are "seen". And for Webster, objective truth is revealed only through a repudiation of subjective seeing: it is then that we ask what we can really know of the self, or others. Webster, in suggesting that there is little knowing, only a capacity to feel, espouses the Renaissance Neoplatonic belief that archetypal meaning and myth, indeed art and metaphor , bridge the gulf of alienation.[38]

Thus, if myths are used as "vehicles for communicating metaphysical and psychological insights",[39] I substitute "poetics" for "myth" and turn to the subject of my thesis: Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.*

38 The paradoxes in Plato's attitude to art are too complex to pursue here – likewise, the subject of Renaissance Neoplatonism. For a traditional account of the latter, see Cassirer.

39 Tarnas, p. 215.

# CHAPTER 1

woe to him that is alone when he falleth;
for he hath not another to help him up[1]

If, in the blink of an eye, it were possible for us to shift our gaze from Holbein's representation of Jean de Dinteville and George de Selve to the entry of the ambassadors in III. i. of a performance of *The White Devil*, we would undoubtedly experience a moment of disequilibrium. For it would appear that through the art of the conjuror Holbein had both triplicated his subjects and brought them to life. Taking the stage would be not two, but six ambassadors, all magnificently dressed in the costumes appropriate to their office.[2] But where, in the painting, we see a distorted *memento mori*, on stage, in *The White Devil,* we would see the malcontent Flamineo; and where the former's challenge to the ambassadors is symbolic and visual, the latter's is subjective and verbal. To ensure that we are destabilized from seeing with "linear" vision, and not seduced by the visual feast supplied by the opulence of their dress, the ambassadors' presence is quickly tainted by his acerbic response. In what is more than an undermining of their aestheticized appearance, Flamineo brutally subverts what Webster posits as the dominant formations of male subjectivity within the Renaissance court: autonomy, sexual potency, high status, equestrian skill and military prowess. As the French and the

1 Ecclesiastes 4. 10.

2 This is assuming that the ambassadors are in costume contemporaneous with the play's setting, in which case their appearance would be spectacular indeed. See David Gunby, David Carnegie and Antony Hammond, *The Works of John Webster*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.88. Hereafter cited as *Works*.

Spanish ambassador take the stage, Flamineo charges the former with impotency and military and equestrian ineptitude, and the latter with a lack of status, autonomy and social grace. He declares of the French ambassador that when he

> saw him at last Tilting, he shewed like a peuter candlesticke fashioned like a man in armour, houlding a Tilting staffe in his hand, little bigger then a candle of twelve i'th pound ... hee sleepes a horse-backe like a poulter.
>
> (65-70) [3]

And about the Spanish ambassador, Flamineo jeers:

> He carries his face in's ruffe as I have seene a serving-man carry glasses in a cipres hat-band, monstrous steddy for feare of breaking. He lookes like the claw of a blacke-bird, first salted and then broyled in a candle.
>
> (72-5)

But Flamineo sees with a jaundiced eye: his attack on the ambassadors is caused by his resentment of those who enjoy the privileges he is denied. Indeed, where the audience cannot validate his remarks regarding the French ambassador's sexual and military prowess, they are unlikely to agree with him that the Spanish ambassador looks like an unpalatable dish of game. If the ambassadors are parodies, on the one hand of the militarized, Machiavellian subject, and on the other, the aesthetic courtier as idealized by Castiglione, it is because these are the ideological models for Renaissance subjectivity as it exists in the Websterian Roman court. But inasmuch as Flamineo's attack is focussed

3 *Works*. All citations hereafter from *Works*.

on the French and Spanish ambassadors' subjectivity, it also undercuts the institutionalized power they represent. Hence, although "minor" characters who, for the most part, remain silent, the ambassadors have an important role to play in *The White Devil*. They show subjectivity and patriarchal, institutional power as correlatives: as symbols of one, they are symbols of the other.

As the ambassadors' presence at Vittoria's trial and, later, her wedding celebrations confirms, the Roman court is a world of Machiavellian *realpolitik*. Where Vittoria's trial, rather than a dispassionate pursuit of truth, is a display of patriarchal power and misogyny, the ambassadors' presence gives this sanction. Although the English ambassador notes that "the Cardinals too bitter" (III.ii.108) and that Vittoria "hath a brave spirit" (140), he and the others remain, for the most part, observers. The ambassadors are disinclined to influence the trial's outcome; they uphold the ideological formations by which Vittoria is condemned. Indeed, among the few remarks passed by any of his counterparts, the French ambassador suggests that "The proofes [against Vittoria] are evident" (III.iii.17). Yet later, as Brachiano indicates, "It hath pleas'd / The great Ambassadours of severall Princes ... To grace [his] marriage, and to honour [him]" (V.i.54-7) by engaging in a jousting contest. Thus the ambassadors show that, despite their tacit support for the Roman court's sentencing of Vittoria as "whore", they also, for *raisons d'état*, maintain good relations with Brachiano.

Similarly, in a scene which otherwise seems gratuitous, the ambassadors' presence on stage during Monticelso's off-stage election as pope confirms that subjectivity is predicated on a Machiavellian drive for

power. This is confirmed by the English ambassador's remarks to his French counterpart. As the cardinals enter the conclave, he notes:

> 'Tis lawfull for the Embassadours of Princes
> To enter with them, and to make their suit
> For any man their Prince affecteth best.
>
> (IV.iii. 29-31)

Furthermore, by focussing, not on the election itself, but its preamble, Webster uses the ambassadors to show that individual power is institutionally underpinned. Lodovico's inventory of costume and title confirms that the ambassadors' function is not only that of go-between, but also as symbols of institutional power; to Gasparo's question, "why do [the ambassadors] weare / These severall habits?" (5-6), Lodovico replies:

> O sir, they'r Knights
> Of severall Orders.
> That Lord i'th blacke cloak with the silver crosse
> Is Knight of *Rhodes*; the next Knight of S. *Michael*;
> That of the golden fleece; the *French-man* there
> Knight of the Holy-Ghost; my Lord of *Savoy*
> Knight of th'Annuntiation; the *Englishman*
> Is Knight of th'honoured Garter, dedicated
> Unto their Saint, S. *George*.
>
> ( 6-14)

Thus, as visual reminders of patriarchal, institutional power, the ambassadors serve yet another purpose: metonymic of the institutions

they represent, they are, effectively, aesthetic objects empty of ontological reality. The conclusion to be drawn is, that in serving the institutions from which power stems, men do not gain subjectivity, but efface it; they reveal not authentic being, but become, like Holbein's ambassadors, iconic representatives of an ideology.

The correlation between what Webster reproduces dramatically and what Holbein represents pictorially can also be seen in the closing moments of *The White Devil*. Just as the ambassadors materialize in triplicate, so too, in a sense, does Holbein's *memento mori*; juxtaposed with the six ambassadors are the "real" corpses of Vittoria, Zanche and Flamineo. Hence, the ambassadors' presence is particularly important, and this is especially so given the additional presence of the young prince Giovanni. Thus the symbols of institutional power are juxtaposed, not only with the "anamorphic" presence of death, but also an emergent Renaissance subject. As Giovanni exerts his newly acquired patriarchal authority, his transformation is more than that of child to man; it is that of child to Machiavellian prince. Where earlier, Giovanni was, in his father's words, an overreacher in embryo – the "Lap-wing; / [Who] flies with the shell on's head" (II.i.124-5) – he is now one of the fully-fledged "Eagles" (49), who, as his uncle puts it, "soare high" (50) and "gaze upon the Sunne" (49). But it is Flamineo's earlier image of the boy-become-prince which most appositely describes Giovanni's juxtaposition with the lifeless forms lying at his feet. When seen in relation to the Renaissance notions of subjectivity as equestrian, autonomous and omnipotent, Giovanni is "now, ... ith saddle" (V.iv.17) and experiencing the "brave thing [it is] for a man to sit by himselfe: he may stretch himselfe in the stirrops, looke about, and

see the whole compasse of the Hemisphere" (V.iv.15-17). Thus Giovanni has not only acquired the power correlative to subjectivity that Flamineo denies the ambassadors,[4] but also egocentric "Cartesian" vision.

As Giovanni unflinchingly issues orders for the imprisonment and torture of the murderers, he overlooks the *mementi mori* before him. In exerting patriarchal authority, he thus reasserts the formations of subjectivity which have led to the destruction of three people. The child who had formerly responded to Flamineo's equestrian imagery with an urging that he "Study [his] praiers ... and be penitent, / 'Twere fit you'd thinke on what hath former bin" (V.iv.18-19), now asserts the authority of the powerful Renaissance prince:

> Away with them to prison, and to torture;
> All that have hands in this, shall tast our justice,
> As I hope heaven.
>
> (V.vi. 286-8)

Giovanni no longer speaks of penitence, but of retributive justice; from the last two lines it can be inferred that he believes patriarchal and divine justice to be analogous. Hence Peter Thomson's comment that "Surely even Webster doesn't intend order to be restored by six doddering

4 Of course Giovanni is, as yet, too young for an exertion of sexual power. In I.ii.131-5, however, his precocious awareness of sexual politics is evident.

old men and a juvenile",[5] invites a rejoinder. First, it is clear that Giovanni *is* capable of restoring order; in the context of Webster's representation of the Roman court, it is doubtful that he will remain his mother's pious and compassionate child. Second, there is no evidence that the ambassadors are old and infirm. [6] To take Flamineo's vitriol at face value, which Thomson seems to do, is to invalidate the ambassadors' role as symbols and upholders of Renaissance subjectivity, not only here, but in the play as a whole.

Inasmuch as Flamineo's disparagement of the ambassadors is calculated to attack the imperatives of subjectivity from which he is excluded, it is psychologically motivated. But it also functions metadramatically as an attack on Castiglione's notion of the aestheticized courtier. As such, Flamineo's ridicule of the Spanish ambassador's appearance is reminiscent of the appetitive imagery Castiglione uses to describe the courtier's desire for verification as an aesthetic object. In the words of Frederico Fregosi, should the courtier

> [happen] to engage in arms in some public spectacle, such as jousting, tourneying or volleying, or other kind of physical recreation, mindful of where and in whose presence he is, he will make sure that he is elegant and attractive in the exercise of arms as he is competent, and that he feeds the eyes of those who are looking

5 Thomson also considers the role of the ambassadors as "slight" and "a failure". See Peter Thomson,"Webster and the Actor", *John Webster,* Brian Morris Ed. (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1970), pp.43-44.

6 Holbein's ambassadors are clearly young men. See Chamberlain, p.44.

> on with everything that can give him added grace. He will ensure that ... he ... is suitably attired, with appropriate mottoes and ingenious devices to attract the eyes of the onlookers in his direction as surely as the loadstone attracts iron.[7]

Where Fregosi's words confirm the military aspect of the Renaissance subject, they also refer to the quality Flamineo presents as absent in the French and Spanish ambassadors – *sprezzatura,* or aplomb. This Fregosi describes as the courtier's ability to "practise in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever [he] says or does seem uncontrived and effortless". [8] When considered in the light of this statement, Flamineo's view of the French ambassador as "a peuter candlesticke fashioned like a man in armour", becomes remarkably parodic and subversive; he suggests that the freedom to mould the self results in the representation of yet another representation.

Flamineo's reference to armour, however, is a reminder that where Castiglione's courtier cultivates *sprezzatura* for life at court, the Machiavellian subject sees his proper sphere as in the battlefield. As Machiavelli puts it:

> A Prince ought to have no other aim or thought, nor select anything else for his study, than war and its rules and discipline; for this is the sole art that belongs to him who rules, and it is of such force that it not only upholds those who are born princes, but it often enables men to rise from a private station to that

7 Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London:Penguin Books, 1967) p. 116. Hereafter cited as Castiglione.

8 Ibid., p.67.

rank.[9]

Indeed, it is as a Machiavellian prince in the making that Giovanni is presented. His first appearance on stage is marked by his expressed desire for militarized subjectivity: he reminds his uncle "you did promise mee a horse / And armour" (*WD* II.i.6-7). In a later appearance where he is, significantly, dressed in armour, Giovanni requests a "pike" (108), gives a precocious display of his burgeoning skill as a military strategist (126-35), and reveals his aspiration to "Be leader to an army" (113) and "charge the French foe, in the very front / Of all [his] troupes, [as] the formost man" (120-2). All signal that Giovanni is, indeed, "Growing to a souldier" (II.i.108).

It is Giovanni, however, who most poignantly reveals the self-fashioned Renaissance subject – powerful, aestheticized, and militaristic – as culturally produced and the antithesis of authentic being. Hence, his appearance in II.i. is of particular importance; although marked by Giovanni's witty and charming exchange with Francisco, its purpose is more serious than that of dramatic light relief. Interposed between a scene in which Giovanni's father disdains paternal responsibility, and another in which his mother takes that responsibility upon herself, it functions as a dramatic metaphor for Giovanni's as yet incomplete fashioning. As a *tabula rasa* on which male subjectivity is to inscribed, Giovanni has merely the *potential* to become a Renaissance subject; in a negation of any *a priori* yearning for his soul's union with the divine, he must be inculcated with desire which is directed towards secular goals. Thus,

9 Machiavelli, p.111.

where Francisco's insistence that "a good habite makes a child a man, / Whereas a bad one makes a man a beast" (136-7) resonates with Aristotelian notions of an actualizing subjectivity, it also privileges a rationalist view of human nature over a Platonic-Augustinian insistence on desire as the essence of authentic being. Moreover, that subjectivity is not intrinsic, but a patriarchally endowed male prerogative is indicated when Monticelso warns Brachiano: "Whom should [Giovanni] rather strive to imitate / Then his owne father" (104-5). And when he further describes Giovanni as "apt for knowledge" (100), and a "casket" (98) for the "Crowns" (99) of both his father and uncle, it is clear that what we see is an exposé of secular prince-making in praxis.

Significantly, Giovanni is, at this point in the play, still responsive to his mother's influence; this is shown when, after her murder, he speaks not of military matters, but on the nature of death, and maternal love (III.ii. 320-34). Thus David Gunby is right to suggest that evidence supports the view that the dominant influence on Giovanni's personality is that of his mother and not his uncle; but he is unduly optimistic in rejecting as extreme any suggestion that Giovanni is a villain in the making. Since Isabella's death removes her influence, the inculcation of patriarchal constructions of subjectivity is no longer counterbalanced by the feminine. As Flamineo makes clear, to "retaine [a mother's] milke / In [a man's] pale forehead" (I.ii. 313-14), is to enervate the overreacher and weaken his lust for power. And although his remark is cynical, when seen in relation to subjectivity as it exists in the Roman court, Flamineo's opinion that Giovanni's "Tallants ... will grow out in time" (V.iv. 7-8) is justifiable. This makes Giovanni's response to his mother's death all the

more moving; it is a child's final response to his mother's influence before he assumes power.

In contrast to *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi* does not end with a young prince's exercise of patriarchal authority. Instead we hear Delio's condemnation of power disassociated from integrity and truth (V.v.112-120), and his wish to "establish [Antonio's son] ... / In's *mothers* right" (111-12, emphasis added). Where this suggests a repudiation of patriarchal formations (the Duchess dies asserting not her princely status, but a mother's concern for her children), it is paralleled by Antonio's opening of the play in praise of the French court (I.i.4-22). By implication it is the Malfi court he condemns. Indeed, as the play reveals, this "Princes Court" (11) is not "like a common Fountaine, whence ... flow[s] / Pure silver-droppes in generall" (12-13), but an environment which is "poyson't neere the head" (14) and which bestows nothing but "Death, and diseases" (15). The poison of which Antonio speaks is, in Augustinian terms, concupiscence, or the desire which focusses on earthly, rather than heavenly, reward. Where this Platonically biased contempt for wordly concerns finds its Renaissance voice in Erasmus, it also draws on scriptural precedence; thus Erasmus sees the desire for wealth as the root of all evil. In his *De Contemptu Mundi* he writes:

> there is nothing more wretched, nothing more elusive, nothing more ruinous than wealth, which is the teacher and handmaiden of all vice. ... It gives birth to a wicked desire for possession, it gives rise to injustice, it sprouts factions, it is the origin of embezzlement, theft, sacrilege, robbery, and fraud. Desire spawns incest, gives birth to adultery ... and nourishes mad passion and debauchery.[10]

10 Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus*: *Spiritualia*, ed. John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) p. 140. Hereafter cited as Erasmus.

As Ferdinand suggests, he "had a hope / (Had [his sister] continu'd widow) to have gain'd / An infinite masse of Treasure by her death " (*DM* IV.ii.270-2). However, whether that was " the mayne cause" (273) of her murder, rather than "her Marriage: / That drew a streame of gall quite through [his] heart" (273-4), becomes irrelevant when considered in the light of Erasmus's statement. For viewed from this perspective, Ferdinand's lust, whether for money or his sister, has its source in the same wellspring of desire. Similarly, the Duchess's passionate nature is measured in relation to her economic resources. This is revealed by Ferdinand's request, in conjunction with his allusions to her as a "lusty Widowe" (I.i.325), that the Duchess "give ore [her] chargeable Revels" (319). Although these comments can be dismissed as from a perspective coloured by lust, they are nonetheless verified by the Duchess herself. She is making her will when she woos Antonio (362) and her sexual innuendo in offering Antonio "a wealthy Mine" (415), is explicit. By describing her sexuality as being as abundant as her fortune, the Duchess, like her brother, merges sexual desire with cupidity. Indeed, despite his repudiation of ambition (406-14), Antonio acquiesces in the marriage.

In *The White Devil,* lust is equally equated with concupiscence. Where to play Brachiano's pandar provides "a path ... open and ... free / To [Flamineo's] preferment" (*WD* I.ii. 312-3), there is a clear link between sexuality and economic gain. Here, it is a malcontent's exploitation of others' lust; but when Francisco notes that Vittoria "wears cloth of Tissue" (II.i. 55), he implies that, since Camillo is "Lord of a poore fortune" (54), Vittoria's dress is her return as Brachiano's lover. But what is here

implicit, is, when Vittoria is wooed by Brachiano, made explicit. When Brachiano says to her, " I will but change / My jewell for your Jewell" (I.ii. 207-80), he speaks of genitals as items of economic exchange; in this instance, it is, indeed, his wealth in exchange for Vittoria's sexual favours. But where his desire *is* sexual, Vittoria's can be seen as economically as well as sexually, motivated. As she is admits when dying: "O my greatest sinne lay in my blood. / Now my blood paies for't" (V.vi. 235-6). Whereas this refers to her sexual passion, when viewed through an Augustinian-Erasmian filter, it equally suggests that her desire is also for Brachiano's wealth.

But the desire which "spawns incest, gives birth to adultery, fosters rape, and nourishes mad passion and debauchery" at Malfi and Rome also proceeds from those who hold ecclestiastical power. As Francisco, in *The White Devil,* confirms: "Divinity, wrested by some factious bloud, / Draws swords, swels battels, and orethrowes all good" (IV. i. 93-4). And Francisco, having just received Monticelso's "blacke booke" ( 33), has reason to know. Monticelso's response to his request, "Good my Lord let me borrow this strange doctrine"(64), has been unequivocal: "Pray use't my Lord" (65). In releasing the book to Francisco, Monticelso shows his tacit approval of Francisco's stated intent that "it serve / To point me out a list of murderers, / Agents for any villany" ( 85-7). Likewise, in *The Duchess of Malfi* , where Delio reveals that, although Bosola is guilty of executing "a notorious murther, ... 'twas thought / The Cardinall suborn'd it" (I.i.66-7), Antonio notes:

> he strewes in his way Flatterers, Panders, Intelligencers, Athiests, and a thousand such politicall Monsters: he should have beene Pope: but in stead of

> comming to it, by the primative decensie of the church, he did bestow bribes, so largely, and so impudently , as if he would have carried it away without Gods knowledge.
>
> (150-5)

This view of the Cardinal as corrupt is confirmed, moreover, when we see him conducting an adulterous liaison with Julia (II.iv.28-39), and later poisoning her (V.ii.270). In addition, he openly solicits Bosola's services as Antonio's assassin (118-9), and admits that he "counsell'd" (V.ii.102) his sister's murder.

Since the "disease" of misdirected desire emanates from the head of the state, the pattern for Giovanni's role as prince is clearly Machiavellian. When the normally cynical Flamineo expresses his admiration for Francisco/Mulinassar, for example, it is for his unsurpassed military "excellence". Flamineo has not

> seene a goodlier personage,
> Nor ever talkt with man better experienc't
> In State-affares or rudiments of warre.
> He hath by report, serv'd the *Venetian*
> In *Candy* these twice seven yeares, and bene cheife
> In many a bold designe.
>
> (V.i.6-11)

That status, military success and personal aggrandizement are imperatives to male subjectivity is also confirmed by the Duchess of Malfi. For just as Ferdinand speaks of Julia's sexual liaisons in terms of warfare (I.i. 100-109), so the Duchess, "borne great" (I.i. 427) and

asserting a masculine persona as "Prince" (362), describes her intention to woo and marry Antonio as if she were a soldier. Describing sexual fulfilment as the outcome of heroic military action, she declares:

> If all my royall kindred
> Lay in my way unto this marriage,
> I'll'd make them my low foote-steps: And even now,
> Even in this hate (as men in some great battailes
> By apprehending danger, have atchiev'd
> Almost impossible actions: I have heard Souldiers say so),
> So I, through frights, and threatnings, will assay
> This dangerous venture.
>
> (326-34)

In contrast to the Duchess's description of her desire to claim Antonio in terms of aggression and near-Machiavellian ruthlessness, however, is Antonio's view, not of passionate pursuit, but of sexual apathy. Of marriage he speaks negatively, and of paternity, with equivocation:

> Say a man never marry, nor have children,
> What takes that from him? Onely the bare name
> Of being a father, or the weake delight
> To see the little wanton ride a cocke-horse
> Upon a painted sticke, or heare him chatter
> Like a taught Starling.
>
> (*DM* I.i. 384-9)

Just as, at the court of Malfi, Antonio defines himself as an outsider by his French attire, so he also places himself outside its ideological parameters

of subjectivity. Significantly, in rejecting both paternity and ideologically inculcated militarism, he also rejects the patriarchal power from which as an "Over-seer" (I.i. 369) he would remain excluded. But what Antonio's remarks help to confirm – especially when seen in relation to those of the Duchess – is the power-subjectivity correlative as it exists in the Roman court. This is a patriarchal world where militaristic subjectivity is proactively asserted and ideologically sustained.

It is ironic, therefore, that Ferdinand acknowledges Antonio as being "a good Horse-man" (I.i.132). Furthermore, when he then asks, "what doe you thinke of good Horse-man-ship?" (133), Antonio's reply is, in its support of princely action, as idealistic as the speech in which he condemns the Machiavellian principality:

> Noblely (my Lord): as out of the Grecian-horse, issued many famous Princes: So, out of brave Horse-man-ship, arise the first Sparkes of growing resolution, that raise the minde to noble action.
>
> (134-6)

Where these remarks support the notion of heroic overreaching, they are inconsistent with Antonio's rejection of patriarchal power and ambition as "a great mans madnes" (406). Thus they seem to justify the Cardinal's later observation that Antonio "do account religion / But a Schoole-name, for fashion of the world" (V.ii. 127-8). Indeed, as his compliance with the Duchess's secular marriage suggests, Antonio has as much desire for power as others: his denigration of Bosola as "leacherous, covetous, or proud" (I.i.26) is equally applicable to himself. Hence, despite his utterances to the contrary, he is as much a tacit supporter of

Machiavellian subjectivity as the ambassadors in *The White Devil*.

If equestrian skill is a metaphor for the power-subjectivity correlative, conversely, its lack is used to describe those who are outside its sphere. Just as Flamineo denigrates the French ambassador for impotency and inept horsemanship, so, in similar terms, Delio represents Castruchio:

> I never knew man and beast, of a horse and a knight,
> So weary of each other; if he had had a good backe,
> He would have undertooke to have borne his horse,
> His breech was so pittifully sore.
>
> (*DM* II.iv. 53-6)

Bosola, however, uses equestrian imagery to illustrate his subjugation to Ferdinand. Since his real employment as a spy is, significantly, concealed as "Provisor-ship o'th [Duchess's] horse" (I.i.255), Bosola describes himself as less than even an incompetent rider: he tells Ferdinand: "Say then my corruption / Grew out of horse-doong" (I.i. 273-4). Camillo's alleged impotence and his foolishness, however, are illustrated in equestrian terms which go far beyond verbal disparagement or self-contempt: he is murdered by means of a vaulting horse. As a parodic acting out of the lack of subjectivity elsewhere expressed metaphorically, the audience sees not an omniscient and omnipotent man astride a horse, but one pitched over its effigy.[11] After Camillo's neck is wrung, the semiotic impact of his death is reinforced: he is then "*laye[d] ... foulded double as 'twere under*

11 As illustrations show, vaulting horses in the Jacobean period had crafted heads to resemble the real animal; this would have enhanced the symbolic impact of one being used as the vehicle of Camillo's murder. See *Works*, p.86.

*the horse* " (*WD* II.ii.37.07).

The world of the Websterian Renaissance court is clearly hierarchical. But whereas as Castruchio confirms that "It is fitting a Souldier arise to be a Prince" (*DM* I.i. 91), the Machiavellian subject does not gain power without subjugating others. This, Bosola sees as ever-diminishing power. As he puts puts it: "places in the Court, are but like beds in the hospitall, where this mans head lies at that mans foote, and so lower, and lower" (I.i. 62-4). Thus – to use Bosola's analogy – to be at the head of the bed, is to be omnipotent. This is precisely what Brachiano, in *The White Devil*, asserts. Threatening Flamineo with punishment for his murder of Marcello, he warns:

> I will not graunt your pardon ...
> Onely a lease of your life. And that shall last
> But for one day. Thou shalt be forc't each evening
> To renew it, or be hang'd.
>
> (V.ii. 71-4)

It is ironic, however, that Brachiano, having encouraged the overreaching aspirations of his son, now asserts power in a way reminiscent of that exerted by Zeus over Prometheus. But if Webster wanted to make his point about the solipsism of self-fashioning, he could hardly have made it more powerfully; it is as Brachiano speaks that Lodovico sprinkles Brachiano's beaver with poison. Moreover, in doing so, he also shows self-fashioning to be self-annihilating: Brachiano, in placing the beaver on his head self-administers the fatal draught. Just as Camillo's murder is engineered through one symbol of power, so another becomes the vehicle

for the destruction of Brachiano's self-acclaiming subjectivity and his life. For although Francisco states that he could have as easily poisoned Brachiano's "praier booke, or a paire of beades, / The pummell of his saddle, his looking-glasse, / Or th'handle of his racket" (*WD* V.i. 66-8), his choice is to murder Brachiano while dressed as a militarized subject. Furthermore, in poisoning Brachiano's beaver – the part contrived to protect the head – he produces a powerful metaphor for the deconstruction of humanism's privileging of the rational. As the poison takes effect, it is, indeed, Brachiano's mind which disintegrates. When seen metadramatically as a sinister parellel to Holbein's anamorphic skull in *The Ambassadors*, the poisoned headpiece thus destroys, in terms of the "realism" of the play, what the skull does symbolically.

There is, however, an ironic preamble to Brachiano's unperceived "self"-destruction, through his dress. This occurs at Vittoria's trial when he throws his "*rich gowne*" (III.ii.3.01) to the floor to serve as a "stoole" (172). This discarding and denigration of a symbol of his ducal status is a gesture contrived to subvert proceedings; indeed, Brachiano's location beneath the sight-lines of his overlookers and his prolonged silence have a dramatic effect more stunning and sustained than any brief outburst by Flamineo. But inasmuch as his sitting upon a symbol of power and status highlights the metonymic function of dress in a scene dominated by appearances, Brachiano is also inadvertently self-subverting: he draws attention to his own non-authentic being. Responsible for Isabella's and Camillo's death, he does not speak for fear of self-incrimination; this, and the removal of his gown signal not only his absence of status and loss of power, but also that the man beneath has no moral agency. Beyond his

gown and his ideologically constructed identity, he is existentially absent.

When, on leaving the courtroom, Brachiano suggests that his abandoned garment be used by Monticelso to "make / Valence for his bed on't, or a demy foote-cloth / For his most reverent moile" (176-8), he reaffirms the function of dress in constructing subjectivity and sustaining institutional power. As a parallel to Brachiano's earlier remark that "all [Francisco's] reverent wit / Lies in his wardrope: hee's a discret fellow / When hee's made up in his roabes of state" (II.i. 183-5), this is tantamount to saying that Francisco's identity is a fabrication; put on with his dress, it is as transient and as fraudulent as the actor's role. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, however, it is Antonio's failure to dress in accord with his station, that prompts Ferdinand to remark that he is "A slave, ... [Who] nev'r in's life, look'd like a Gentleman, / But in the audit time" (III.iii.69-71). The implication here is that Antonio's dress is congruent with his unambitious identity. That this is an identity no less "put on" than any other in the court of Malfi is indicated, however, in the opening of the play. Appearing as "A very formall French-man" (I.i. 3), Antonio not only signals his admiration for the French court, but also marks himself as an outsider. Thus wearing his "habit" (3) for its semiotic function, Antonio signals that he is, indeed, an actor playing a part. Moreover, that this signal of disapproval of the Malfi court is made self-consciously is revealed in Antonio's ready allusions to acting when he sees a disjunction between appearance and interiority in others. Seeing Ferdinand as counterfeit and pluralized, Antonio describes him in terms of the actor who "borrows" the faculties of others:

> What appeares in him mirth, is meerely outside:
> If he laugh hartely, it is to laugh
> All honesty out of fashion ...
> He speakes with others Tongues, and heares mens suites
> With others Eares.
>
> (I.i.158-62)

Whereas, he says of the Cardinal:

> Some ... flashes superficially hang on him, for forme: but observe his inward Character: he is a mellancholly Church-man: The Spring in his face,is nothing, but the ingendring of Toades.
>
> (146-8)

Webster's use of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor to critique the inauthenticity of Renaissance subjectivity is particularly effective, however, in III.iv of *The Duchess of Malfi.* Here, in the religious setting of the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto, the audience see the Cardinal ritually "resigne his Cardinals hat" (III.iv.3), and "turne Souldier" (III.iii.1). As the stage directions state:

> *Here the Ceremony of the Cardinalls enstalment, in the habit of a Souldier: perform'd in delivering up his Crosse, Hat, Robes, and Ring, ... and investing him with Sword, Helmet, Sheild, and Spurs.*
>
> (III.iv 5.01-3)

But what the audience actually see is an actor's on-stage change of role: the Cardinal divests one costume in preference for another. Subjectivity is shown, even more effectively than through the ambassadors' role in *The*

*White Devil*, as a metonym for institutional power. Where the ambassadors are fixed in their role, the Cardinal is not; that he can take a soldier's part with no more than a change of garments reveals the insubstantiality of his identity as Cardinal. Indeed, that too is no more than a role. In using what is a compellingly theatricalized metaphor for the Renaissance shift from a spiritualized to a secular subjectivity, [12] Webster does more than emphasize the performative nature of identity: he suggests that just as the metonymic self is an existential vacuum, so it is a hubristic repudiation of God. This point is also powerfully made in *The White Devil*: when Lodovico and Gasparo administer a demonic inversion of the last rites to the dying Brachiano then brutally strangle him, it is in their role as Capuchins.

When the Duchess says to Antonio that "unjust actions / Should weare these masques and curtaines, and not we" (III.ii. 158-9), she speaks of the role that she has "fashion'd" (160) for him in order to aid his flight from Malfi. Her remark is, of course, ironic when set in the broader context of both plays. But what is important here is that Antonio must openly affirm the ideological notion that identity be manipulable for utilitarian purposes. He assumes the role of dishonest steward in order to feign "a ... crime" (179). And although justified, euphemistically, by the Duchess as

12 Keith Sturgess draws attention to a contemporary account of this scene by one Orazio Busino who complains that it presents a harsh view of the Catholic church. He notes:

> [The Cardinal] goes to war, first laying down his ... habit on the altar, with the help of his chaplains, with great ceremoniousness; finally, he has his sword bound on and dons the soldier's sash with so much panache you could not imagine it better done. And all this was acted in condemnation of the grandeur of the Church, which they despise and which in this Kingdom they hate to death.

See Keith Sturgess, *Jacobean Private Theatre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Inc., 1987) p. 110. Hereafter cited as Sturgess.

what "*Tasso* calls / *Magnanima Mensogna*: a Noble Lie" (179-80), it is a lie nonetheless and a violation of Antonio's earlier declaration that "Were there nor heaven, nor hell, / I should be honest" (I.i. 424-5). That Antonio's identity is thus pluralized is a point powerfully made when he adopts the malcontent's discourse:

> O the inconstant,
> And rotten ground of service, you may see:
> 'Tis ev'n like him, that in a winter night
> Takes a long slumber, ore a dying fire;
> As loth to part from't: yet parts thence as cold,
> As when he first sat downe.
>
> (III.ii. 198-203)

That these are lines which we have come to expect of Bosola is both ironic and disturbing. This is the man whom the Duchess had earlier called "compleat" (I.i. 421). Even more unnerving, however, is Bosola's praise of Antonio:

> Can this ambitious age
> Have so much goodnes in't, as to prefer
> A man, meerely for worth, without these shadowes
> Of wealth, and painted honors? possible?
>
> (III.iii.276-9)

Where Webster makes Bosola's and Antonio's identities seem, in some sense, interchangeable, he stresses the instability of subjectivity within the court. Indeed, he suggests that the court is the setting for a play

whose stock roles, not only of steward and malcontent, but also those of prince, cardinal and soldier, can be filled in response to contingency. Thus Webster's use of the *theatrum mundi* tradition produces a compelling metaphor, not only for Renaissance self-fashioned subjectivity as a series of façades but also for Machiavellian utilitarianism as a denial of moral agency.

We know that, here, Antonio is adopting a role and playing "false" to his "authentic" self. Of what we cannot be sure, however, is whether Bosola is compounding his counterfeiting by playing false to his role as malcontent, or whether his words are the expression of his authentic self. Yet that Bosola *is* playing a role is a view held by others. Antonio suggests that Bosola

> Would be as leacherous, covetous, or proud,
> Bloody, or envious, as any man,
> If he had meanes to be so.
>
> (I.i.26-8)

He also tells Bosola that he understands his "in-side" (II.i.78), then warns against dissembling, going on to say: "Because you would not deeme to appeare to th'world puff'd up with your preferment, you continue this out of fashion mellancholly: leave it, leave it" (80-2). From this it is clear that Antonio sees Bosola as ambitious and as driven by Machiavellian desire as those of higher status. This point of view is also supported by Ferdinand; he advises Bosola: "Be your selfe: / Keepe your old garbe of melencholly: 'twill expresse / You envy those that stand above your reach" (I.i. 264-6). When viewed in relation to Bosola's role as a spy, however,

Ferdinand is asking Bosola to act "authentically" by using a simulated display of melancholy as an further extension of this role. Such layering of simulation, paradoxically, leaves Bosola the only means to authenticity available – that of self-acclaimed actor. Where high status characters' subjectivity is asserted *through* acting, Bosola makes acting the end in itself.

Indeed, from the start of *The Duchess of Malfi,* it as an actor that Bosola defines himself. When he speaks of his punishment in the "Gallies" (I.i. 34), for example, it is in terms of his costume: as he says, "for two yeares together, I wore two Towells in stead of a shirt, with a knot on the shoulder, after the fashion of a Romaine Mantle" (I.i.34-36). Yet, when given a set role as Ferdinand's spy – itself devolving from that of "Provisorship o'th [Duchess's] horse" (255) – Bosola stresses his plurality: he is "One of [Ferdinand's] familiars" (246), "a very quaint invisible Divell, in flesh: / An Intelligencer" (247-8), "an impudent traitor" (252), and Ferdinand's "creature" (274). Later, this hydra-like role produces yet three more parts: those of "*old man*" (IV.ii. 107.02), "tombe-maker" (IV.ii.137), and "common Bell-man" (160). When Bosola is denied financial reward for serving Ferdinand, however, he confirms the relationship between role-playing and his capacity for evil:

> Sir,
> I serv'd your tyranny: and rather strove,
> To satisfie your selfe, then all the world;
> And though I loath'd the evill, yet I lov'd
> You that did councell it: and rather sought
> To appeare a true servant, then an honest man.
> (IV.ii. 316-20)

Although, here, Bosola speaks of only two roles and sets them in opposition to each other, his elision of the word "be" is curious; where the verb "appeare" relates to both "servant" and "honest man", Bosola seems to be suggesting that even honesty is a ploy of the dissembler. If so, Antonio's ability to play Bosola's role as malcontent does not exonerate him from the charge that his identity as a humble, pious man is as contrived as Bosola's role as a "true" servant. The conclusion thus to be drawn is that, in the Websterian Renaissance court, the most authentic identity, is, paradoxically, that of the self-proclaimed actor.

Like Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Flamineo in *The White Devil* functions as a sounding-rod with which the depth of ontological authenticity can be measured. He does this, in part, by also drawing attention to his own performances. An example of this is in IV. ii . Having delivered his homily on the symbiotic relationship between the crocodile and the bird to Brachiano (216-27) – itself a critique of the parasitic nature of life at court – Flamineo shares with the audience an observation on his chameleon-like nature:

> It may appeare to some ridiculous
> Thus to talke knave and madman; and sometimes
> Come in with a dried sentence, stuft with sage.
> But this allowes my varying of shapes.
>
> (IV.ii.234-7)

His closing aphorism, "*Knaves do grow great by being great mens apes*"

(238), posits the art of mimesis as the malcontent's means of advancement. Hence, Flamineo's playing of "knave" or "madman" is overshadowed by his more dominant roles as pandar and playwright. Where I.ii. is dominated by his manipulating of the plot to facilitate Brachiano's seduction of his sister, Flamineo announces that he has "dealt" (I.ii.13) with Zanche, by "Some tricke" (34) he locks up Camillo (169-180), and he characterizes Vittoria as a wanton (18-24). Flamineo's most ambitious staging, however, is his multiple suicide plot. Here, by "writing" and performing the "suicide" pact he contrives for himself, Zanche and Vittoria, he combines his duple roles as actor and playwright. When Zanche and Vittoria, agree that they will "Seeme to consente" (72), they imagine themselves to be taking control of events; in fact they unconsciously "play" the roles Flamineo has prescribed for them. As he rises from "death" he tells them "'twas a plot / To prove your kindnesse to mee" (147-8).

But Flamineo's attempt to "write" his own parodic death proves to be nothing other than the actor's unwitting and pathetic rehearsal for his own death. His "dying" confession to Vittoria, "My life hath done service to other men, / My death shall serve mine owne turne" (48-51), is only a simulation of dying "authentically". Given that Flamineo's plot involves a "suicide" pact, this is not possible: in theological terms the taking of one's own life is the ultimate act of hubris. Where, in Antonio's words, "God fashion'd us of nothing: and we strive / To bring ourselves to nothing" (*DM* III.v.78-9), to die authentically can only be achieved when, as "nothing", the individual submits to divine will. Thus, where this scene highlights the solipsism of self-dramatization, it can also be seen as a critique of self-

serving creativity. Without didactic purpose, Flamineo's play-wrighting is as much an expression of egocentricity as his acting: if the actor is not man-as-god, neither is the playwright.

Because he has no illusions about the reality of an environment which shapes, and is shaped by, Machiavellian desire, the malcontent's role is crucial to Webster's interrogation of Renaissance formations of male subjectivity. Thus Flamineo's and Bosola's exploitation and laying bare of the mimetic process functions dialectically at a level deeper than the merely ironic. This is particularly true of Bosola, who sees sumptuous dress, social grace, and military and equestrian skill in ontological terms as masking not disjunction or absence, but decay. Where his attack on "painting" (II.i.28) is initially focussed on the old mid-wife, it modulates into an abstract exposition on the theme of appearances:

> What thing is in this outward forme of man
> To be belov'd? We account it ominous,
> If Nature doe produce a Colt, or Lambe,
> A Fawne, or Goate, in any limbe resembling
> A Man; and flye from't as a prodegy.
> Man stands amaz'd to see his deformity,
> In any other Creature but himselfe.
> But in our owne flesh, though we beare diseases
> Which have their true names onely tane from beasts,
> As the most ulcerous Woolfe, and swinish Meazeall;
> Though we are eaten up of lice, and wormes,
> And though continually we beare about us
> A rotten and dead body, we delight
> To hide it in rich tissew.
>
> (II.i. 41-54)

Here man's malformation, the misrepresentation of his own reality, and his inner disorder – represented in an extended use of animal imagery – is offset with an image of multiple connotations. Where it can be seen as fabric woven with gold or silver thread, courtly dress, or status and wealth, "riche tissew" is a reference to aesthetic exteriors, it can also be seen as a metaphor for the ideology of self-fashioned subjectivity.

Bosola thus draws a distinction between ideology as "riche tissew" – hence man-made – and man's essential state as biological. In this speech, Bosola seems to confirm that, after all, Renaissance man is cosmically symbiotic. If he sees him as consumed and invaded by nature, he reflects a view which is widely expressed in the *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*; both plays are dominated not only with images of "man" as diseased, bestial and prodigious, but also as appetitive, atavistic and elemental. Such images occur when men experience within themselves, or see in others, the immoderate emotions which negate their rational humanist subjectivity. Then, like Bosola they use the language of participatory consciousness where, thinking analogically, the boundaries between things and words collapse: metaphorically, they relocate themselves beyond Alberti's "shatterproof window" and reunite with the matrix.

Examples of this occur in *The Duchess of Malfi* when the Cardinal warns Ferdinand that "intemperate anger" (II.v.58) makes a man "deform'd, [and] beastly" (57), and Pescara suggests that "great men ... are like / Foxes: when their heads are devided / They carry fire in their tailes" (III.iii.36-8). Furthermore, Pescara's image for the cardinal's

destructiveness takes on added significance if the "fire in their tailes" (37) is also construed as the trails of comets; thus it is also as nature's prodigies that men invoke fear, and defy control. Where Antonelli, suggests that Lodovico was "begotten in an Earthquake" (*WD* I.i. 27), Gasparo describes him as "An idle Meteor, which drawne forth the earth / Would bee soone lost ith aire" (25-6). And as Lodovico himself confirms, annihilation by the "violent thunder" of ambition's aftermath is "adored by those / [who] Are pasht to peeces by it" (11-12).

As evidence of Webster's view of the Renaissance subject as appetital, however, *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil* are replete with references to food and consumption. Contravening any notion of the Renaissance subject as dignified and autonomous, Bosola's image of the bestial and the appetitive is a far remove from the initial impression given by Holbein's ambassadors as rational men in control of their world. The Aragonian brothers are " like Plum-trees ... they are rich, and ore-laden with fruite" (*DM* I.i. 48-9), and their sycophants are the "Crowes, Pyes, and Catter-pillers [which] feede on them" (50-1). In addition, characters are described not as consumers of food, but as food itself. In a parallel to Flamineo's description of the Spanish ambassador as an unpalatable dish of broiled blackbird's claw (*WD* III.i.74), the Duchess of Malfi describes the existentially empty Malateste whom "You may looke quite thorough" (43) as void food concocted purely to feed the eye: [13] he is "a meere sticke of sugar-candy" (*DM* III.i. 42). Insubstantial and devoid of

13 Writing about Jacobean feasts, Patricia Fumerton notes that "void food was food primarily for the eye: facade-food. Elaborate conceits of void birds, snow, arms, letters, and so forth were capable of filling only the hunger of vision and – the pang masked by vision – the subjective mind". See Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1991) p. 126. Hereafter cited as Fumerton.

substance Malateste is, in effect, transparent. Where the ambassador and Malateste are also concocted like food to be looked at, Lodovico, inasmuch as he feeds others' ambition *is* consumed. Gasparo's remark that Lodovico's "followers / Have swallowed [him] like Mummia" (*WD* I.i.16), has unmistakeable connotations: the lust for power makes men not only predatory but also cannibalistic. Ostensibly a curative, Lodovico is, however, toxic; he is described by Gasparo as of "such unnaturall and horrid Phisicke" (17) that his followers "Vomit [him] up ith kennell" (18).

When Lodovico describes his appetite for vengeance, however, it is as a hunger which cannot be assuaged. Poised to strike Flamineo in revenge for Isabella's death, he rages:

> Oh could I kill you forty times a day
> And us't foure yeere together; 'tweare to little:
> Nought greev's but that you are to few to feede
> The famine of our vengeance.
>
> (V.vi.194-7)

Moreover, Lodovico compounds the representation of this desire as unappeasable appetite by speaking of a trio of hellish matriarchs who are a parodic inversion of the Christian, patriarchal trinity. He claims "There's but three furies found in spacious hell; / But in a great mans breast three thousand dwell" (IV.iii.153-4). By multiplying matriarchal vengeance a thousand-fold and translocated it to within his psyche, Lodovico reverses classical myth's triumph of rational, institutionalized, patriarchal power

over atavistic drives.[14] Similarly when Brachiano rages against Francisco for having arranged his marriage to Isabella, his expressed wish that "all the hellish furies take [his] soule" (II.i. 188) is confirmed as a violation of Christian ethics by his cursing of the priest who had married him (189-90). Where Lodovico construes his desire for vengeance as an interiorization of the feminine, the pagan and the irrational, Brachiano projects his outwards as a vehicle for another's damnation.

It is Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* who, of all the male characters in both tragedies, is most powerfully represented as the antithesis of the rational humanist subject bound to the other of nature, the animal, the irrational and the excessive. Where the Cardinal describes Ferdinand's rage as bestial (II.v.57), it is as a bestial domain that Ferdinand sees the Court. In contradiction to Flamineo's image of the solitary, exceptional man astride his horse, Ferdinand presents men not in control of, but *as* beasts: as a projection of his psychological state, he warns his sister that she "live[s] in a ranke pasture" (*DM* I.i.293). In this Ferdinand bestializes the appetitive imagery which occur in both plays. Moreover, given the multi-layered meaning of "rank", his image which primarily focusses on appetite, also connotes sexual excess and corruption. Thus, when cursing his sister's imagined lover, Ferdinand represents him as subhuman and, taking his brother's analogy for civilization's antithesis a step further, wishes to reduce the lover's discourse to the instinctual, primitive sounds of the animal: "Let dogs, and Monkeys / Onely converse with him, and such dombe things / To whom Nature denies use, to sound his name" (III.ii. 105-7). But also important is

14 I refer to the overthrow of the Furies by Apollo – as represented in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* – as the eclipse of matriarchal, hence *irrational,* private, revenge, in the cause of dispassionate institutionalized justice.

Ferdinand's invocation that the Duchess

> build
>
> Such a roome for him, as our Anchorites
>
> To holier use enhabite: Let not the Sunne
>
> Shine on him, till he's dead.
>
> (102-5)

Here, in associating sexuality not only with the bestial, but also with social withdrawal, entrapment and darkness, Ferdinand produces an image antithetical to that of the rational, autonomous Renaissance subject. Where the Promethean eagle "commonly [flies] alone" (*DM* V.ii.30), as expressed by Francisco in *The White Devil,* it also draws its power from the sun. When seen from the perspective of both plays' imagery, for a man to thus "grow old [and die] / In [a woman's] Embracements" ( III.ii.101-2) is to perish without subjectivity.

Throughout *The Duchess of Malfi*, the many references to Ferdinand's inaction and self-absorption reinforce his association of himself with the subconscious and sleep, and his disassociation from the dominant formations of male subjectivity.[15] When warning the Duchess against remarriage, for example, he insinuates that "lustfull pleasures, are like

---

15 Hence, a reading of Ferdinand as the embodiment of Lacanian desire is fruitful: especially given his status as twin to his sister. In her essay "Jacques Lacan, Literary Theory, and *The Maids* of Jean Genet", Ellis Ragland-Sullivan writes:

> Societally speaking, patriarchy has always embodied public prestige, and exists on the obverse of the personal, private value of women. The simultaneous entry of speech and separation into the infant's paradise of symbiotic unity imposes a second division within the subject. Divided first between the *moi* and the Other, the subject is now additionally divided between the Other and the *je* , between the "natural" and the cultural.

See Joseph Natoli, ed., *Psychological Perspectives on Literature: Freudian Dissidents and Freudians* ( Hamden: The Shoe String Press, Inc. 1984) p. 103.

heavy sleepes / Which doe fore-run mans mischiefe" (I.i. 312-13). He also suggests that if his subconscious is superfluity, it is as incalculable as the world itself:

> He that can compasse me, and know my drifts,
> May say he hath put a girdle 'bout the world,
> And sounded all her quick-sands.
>
> ( III.i.84-6)

Ferdinand's subconscious is not splintered into multiple "drifts", however, but fixed by an obsessive desire for his sister. Hence, in attempting to dissuade her from marriage, Ferdinand's words are interlaced with phallic references, and their implications underscored by the display of his father's dagger:

> *Ferdinand.* You are my sister,
> This was my Fathers poyniard: doe you see,
> I'll'd be loth to see't looke rusty, 'cause 'twas his:
> .....
> And woemen like that part, which (like the Lamprey)
> Hath nev'r a bone in't
> *Dutchesse.* Fye Sir!
> *Ferdinand.* Nay,
> I meane the Tongue: varietie of Courtship;
> What cannot a neate knave with a smooth tale
> Make a woman beleeve?
>
> (I.i.316-24)

Ferdinand is, furthermore, acutely aware of the power of his imagination to

overwhelm him with images of his sister's sexual activity. He begs his brother to

> talke to me somewhat, quickly,
> Or my imagination will carry me
> To see her, in the shamefull act of sinne.
> .....
> Happily with some strong thigh'd Bargeman;
> Or one o'th'wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge,
> Or tosse the barre, or else some lovely Squire
> That carries coles up, to her privy lodgings.
>
> (II.v. 39-45)

Since the imagined lovers are neither aestheticized nor militarized and their prowess is not equestrian, but bucolic, Ferdinand equates their physical and sexual power with nature and the elemental. By his representation of the squire's actions, Ferdinand also betrays his desire: "privy" is an allusion to genitalia and "lodgings" to sexual penetration.[16] At another level, however, the squire brings "coles" – or fire – to one woman rather than to mankind and Ferdinand's image can be seen as a corrupt version of the Prometheus myth. He reveals male subjectivity not as heroic, but driven by narrowly focussed subconscious drives.

But in associating his sister's sexuality and her imagined lovers with nature and the elemental, Ferdinand is also unconsciously self-inclusive. Where the Duchess receives "coles", he sees himself as the source of, and consumed by fire.[17] As he tells Rodorigo and Grisolan: "Me thinks you that

16 See *Works*, p. 616.

17 For a full acount of Ferdinand's association with fire see *Works*, pp. 390-1.

are Courtiers should be my touch-wood, take fire, when I give fire" (I.i.117-8). Where this adds a further dimension to Ferdinand's image of the squire carrying fuel to the Duchess – by implication, he is its ultimate source – it is one reinforced by his demand that Bosola "feede a fire, as great as [his] revenge, / Which nev'r will slacke, till it have spent his fuell" (IV.i. 137-8). The connotations of tumescence and sexual release are unmistakeable; thus Ferdinand, like Brachiano, reveals that vengeance, jealousy and lust are co-existent. Likewise they are inextricably bound to the pre-Christian, the bestial and the prodigious. As Pescara notes, "A very *Salamander* lives [in Ferdinand's] eye, / To mocke the eager violence of fire" (III.iii. 47-8), and where the Cardinal seems him as a "wild ... Tempest" (II.v.16-17), Ferdinand's rage "carries" him,

> As men convai'd by witches, through the ayre
> On violent whirle-windes; this intemperate noyce,
> Fitly resembles deafe-mens shrill discourse,
> Who talke aloud, thinking all other men
> To have their imperfection.
>
> (II.v 49-54)

By juxtaposing disability and the antichristian with the immoderate and the prodigious, the Cardinal adds yet another category of exclusion to subjectivity; he is quite specific when he goes on to say that "there is not in nature / A thing, that makes man so deform'd, so beastly, / As doth intemperate anger" (56-8). Thus illustrating his belief that subjectivity is predicated on the suppression and denial of desire and the forces of the subconscious, the Cardinal suggests that it is only the prerogative of

those who are physically whole. [18]

Significantly, it is the volume and timbre of deaf men's speech that the Cardinal sees as "intemperate". It is not surprising, therefore, that he uses music as an analogy to reinforce his notion of a harmonious pysche. Just as in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* the lute's broken string contributes to what Greenblatt defines as the "subtle but powerful countercurrent to the forces of harmony, reconciliation, and confident intellectual achievement embodied ... in the picture's figures", [19] so Ferdinand's violent emotions, with their reference to all that is "uncivilized", jangle discordantly in counterpoint to the Cardinal's notion of Renaissance subjectivity. With his instruction: "Come, put yourselfe / In tune" (II.v.61-62), he urges Ferdinand to restore the discrete "sounds" of his personality and blend them into the harmonious relationship which produces unified being.

In using the analogy of sound to describe psychic disharmony, the Cardinal, in some sense, echoes Antonio's views on ambition spoken earlier in the play. But where the former sees harmony as something the individual can impose upon himself, the latter suggests that it is discordance beyond control. This Antonio defines as the madness of ambition; as he tells the Duchess:

> Ambition (Madam) is a great mans madnes,
>
> That is not kept in chaines, and close-pent roomes,

[18] If the Cardinal's belief in rationality, moderacy and actualization as components of subjectivity has, like his counterpart's in *The White Devil*, a strong Aristotelian bias, this is consistent with the Catholic Church's sustained support for Thomist scholasticism. Thus he stands in opposition to Webster's Platonic-Augustinian view of the passionate individual whose faith bypasses the rational and is driven by *caritas*.

[19] Greenblatt, 1980, pp. 18-19

But in faire lightsome lodgings, and is girt
With the wild noyce of pratling visitants,
Which makes it lunatique, beyond all cure.

(*DM* 1.i. 406-10)[20]

Here, Antonio redefines Erasmus's assertion that the desire for wealth comes from the same well-spring as "incest ... mad passion and debauchery", [21] and on this basis, it is Ferdinand who is the most singular vehicle for Webster's exposé of the disintegrated ontological state of the Renaissance male subject. But where he ultimately becomes mad, he is not physically chained up in "close-pent roomes", but psychologically. And Ferdinand's affiliation with darkness, entrapment and social withdrawal occurs early in *The Duchess of Malfi*:

*Antonio.*
[Ferdinand] will seeme to sleepe o'th bench
Onely to intrap offenders in their answeres;
Doomes men to death by information,
Rewards by heare-say.
*Delio.* Then the Law to him
Is like a fowle blacke cob-web to a Spider,
He makes it his dwelling, and a prison
To entangle those shall feede him.

(I.i. 162-8)

That Ferdinand's desire for retribution is nourished by his introspection

20 Antonio is unwittingly prophetic; as a woman who fulfils her private passion, thus flouting patriarchal control of female "honour", the Duchess is herself incarcerated and exposed to the irrationality of the "privately" mad.

21 Erasmus, p. 140.

and somnolence is also shown later in the play; determined to discover the identity of his sister's lover, he announces:

> i'll go sleepe;
> Till I know who leapes my sister, i'll not stirre:
> That knowne, i'll finde Scorpions to string my whips,
> And fix her in a generall ecclipse.
>
> (II.v. 76-9)

Where Antonio sees this in terms of hibernation, noting that Ferdinand is "so quiet, that he seems to sleepe / The tempest out (as Dormise do in Winter)" (III.i. 21-2), this is also a period of gestation: during this time the Duchess produces two children. Thus female procreation is juxtaposed with male solipsism; all Ferdinand can nourish is his lust and retributive appetite.[22]

Having achieved his desire to destroy his sister, Ferdinand succumbs to madness and becomes what he fears he is: earth-bound, bestial and cowering in darkness. The doctor reports

> In those that are possess'd with't there ore-flowes
> Such mellencholly humour, they imagine
> Themselves to be transformed into Woolves,
> Steale forth to Church-yards in the dead of night,
> And dig dead bodies up: as two nights since
> One met the Duke, 'bout midnight in a lane
> Behind St. *Markes* Church, with the leg of a man
> Upon his shoulder; and he howl'd fearefully:

22 While many have considered time lapse between Acts II and III as evidence of weak dramaturgy, I offer this as an explanation for what I believe is a deliberate part of Webster's dramaturgy. See also *Works* pp.382-4.

Said he was a Woolffe.

( V.ii.8-16)

Where thus Ferdinand succumbs to the fate he had wished upon his sister's lover, he, nonetheless, continues to defiantly proclaim his solitariness in terms of the Promethean eagle. Denigrating social interaction as the compulsion of inferior beings, he tells Malateste that "Eagles commonly fly alone: They are Crowes, dawes, and Sterlings that flocke together" (30-31). Ferdinand is not, however, the realization of the Promethean hero whose rebellion against the gods was to alleviate the suffering of mortals, but a chilling foreshadow of the *übermensch* of atheistic existentialism. When seen in these terms, Ferdinand's transformation to a lycanthrope is also his transformation to a dramatic metaphor: his Icarus-like fall from the heavens to a lonely death is a compelling image for what Webster posits as the ultimate outcome of Renaissance humanism's hubristic assertion of the self-fashioned identity.

Inasmuch as Webster shows introspection linked with the nourishing of libidinous drives, he also merges it with melancholy and creativity. [23] Where Bosola "sees" metaphysically (II.i. 41-54), it is from his melancholic frame of mind. Antonio confirms this as associated with inactivity:

'Tis great pitty

He should be thus neglected, I have heard

He's very valiant: This foule mellancholly

23 In the Renaissance, the Medieval concern with melancholy flourished as a correlative with creative genius. See Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1964) pp. 241-274.

> Will poyson all his goodnesse, for (i'le tell you)
> If too immoderate sleepe, be truly sayd
> To be an inward rust unto the soule;
> It then doth follow want of action
> Breeds all blacke male-contents, and their close rearing
> (Like mothes in cloath) doe hurst for want of wearing.
>
> (*DM* I.i.69-77)

Hence Webster's critique of Renaissance self-fashioning reveals a tension between the irreconcilable. Just as George de Selve and Jean de Dinteville submit themselves as objects to the gaze of the painter in order to be represented as subject, and in turn are reconstituted as objects of the viewers' gaze, so Webster's male characters' self-absorption is both the source of their subjectivity and its denial. Where this anticipates Cartesian dualism, Seán Burke's remarks are of interest; he states that *cogito*

> affirms existence as a performative function of consciousness – only in thinking does the meditating subject assure his own existence which is affirmed independently of the body or an external world. 24

Hence Webster's self-fashioned subject *is* sundered into a irreconcilable dualism. In order to assert his own subjectivity he must affirm the self as subject by contemplating the self as object. Furthermore,Webster suggests that a materialist assertion of being, insofar as it hubristically denies human essence and alienates the subject from God, also alienates

24 Seán Burke, *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) p.305.

the subject from himself. Thus, from Webster's Platonist-Augustinian perspective, the Renaissance court, with its glittering façades of "rich tissew", promulgates an ideology which leads to despair.

# CHAPTER 2

the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat [1]

When, in the second scene of *The White Devil,* Flamineo locks up Camillo, remarking "thou intanglest thy selfe in thine owne worke like a silke-worme" (I.ii.179-80), he produces an image of multiple significance. Where, at one level, Flamineo's image is proleptically self-referential – it is Flamineo who is ultimately trapped by his own endeavours – at another, set in the wider context of the Websterian Renaissance court as represented in both tragedies, it has connotations of the feminine and the other. Given that silk thread is the raw material of aestheticization,[2] Flamineo's image functions as a symbol for patriarchal power, appearances and self-dramatized subjectivity. And where that subjectivity is predicated on the repression of "the *anima mundi* ... the community of being, mystery and ambiguity ... imagination, emotion, instinct, body, [and] nature", as embodied in woman, Flamineo's image, concomitantly, becomes a symbol of woman's lack of subjectivity. [3] She is the

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1 Genesis 3.6.

2 Fumerton gives a detailed account of the East India Company's activities in relation to aesthetics and history during the Jacobean period. Silk was part of that trade. See Fumerton, p.169-206.

3 This is still a matter of some debate. Tina Krontiris argues that because women such as Isabella Whitney, Mary Herbert, Elizabeth Carey, Aemilia Lanyer, and Mary Wroth were writing during the Jacobean period, in some measure women did have a voice, albeit one which frequently employed the language of male discourse. See *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1992). My point, however, is that where, in Webster's tragedies, Renaissance constructions of subjectivity are predicated on woman as the embodiment of the other, she is denied subjectivity.

disempowered creature unable to extricate herself from her bindings.

Inasmuch as this is a world in which the silkworm "spinnes" (*WD* I.ii. 163), and a woman's tongue "winde[s] ... about [a man's] heart, / Like a skeine of silke" (*DM* V.ii. 214-5), Flamineo's image suggests the guile and circularity which threatens the linear vision of the male subject; conversely, it can also be seen to represent the multiple strands of the misogynous discourse which sustains male subjectivity. As Stephen Greenblatt points out:

> Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic ... witch, adulteress ... Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed.[4]

Indeed, just as the silkworm is destroyed in the harvesting of its thread, so the women in *The White Devil* and the *Duchess of Malfi* are sacrificed as "heretic, ... witch, adulteress" and the "Antichrist".

Where Flamineo's and Bosola's misogyny runs like a thread through *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, both weave the "rich tissew" (*DM* II.i.54) of an ideology of subjectivity predicated on the exclusion and destruction of the other. Thus they manipulate what Dympna Callaghan terms "the distracted desires of others in the sphere of sexuality". [5] As she points out:

> Misogyny is part of the malcontent pathology, part of the alienation of those characters from whom we expect invective against women by virtue of dramatic

4 Greenblatt, 1980, p. 9.

5 Dympna Callaghan, *Woman and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, 1989) p.139.

> convention, whose misogynistic voice is privileged at the purely dramatic level to function as the enunciator of gender ideology.[6]

Flamineo and Bosola are, however, as driven by their lust for economic and political power as are those in control. Inasmuch as they reinforce the misogyny which thrives in the courts of Rome and Malfi, they draw upon it as the source of their empowerment.

In promulgating the misogynous discourse, however, the malcontents in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* project onto women a magnified image of the Websterian Renaissance subject's alienation. Hence, if they denigrate women as duplicitous, inauthentic and libidinous, it is because these are the qualities the male subject sees and represses in himself. And, invariably, these qualities are expressed in terms of man's conflict with nature and beast. Thus, if women are ruled by "excess" emotion, they are, according to Flamineo, "like burres; / Where their affection throwes them, there they'l sticke" (*WD* V.i.89-90), whereas, in an image of masculine power secured by woman's passivity, he suggests that "A quiet woman / Is a still water under a great bridge. / A man may shoot her safely" (IV.ii.175-7). Where Flamineo produces this latter image in response to Brachiano's quarrel with Vittoria over her imagined infidelity, he urges Brachiano to take control. For the same purpose, it is augmented by those of capture and torment. To encourage Brachiano to curb Vittoria's rage, Flamineo tells him:

> Yong Leverets stand not long; and womens anger
> Should, like their flight, procure a little sport;

6 Ibid., p.125.

A full crie for a quarter of an hower;
And then bee put to th' dead quat.
(IV.ii. 155-8)

This, in turn, is matched by his further suggestion that Brachiano "Hand [Vittoria], ... and kisse her: be not like / A ferret to let go your hold with blowing" (IV.ii. 163-4). Although here Flamineo bestializes Brachiano, Vittoria is in control: she is the aggressor and Brachiano her victim. [7]

Flamineo also suggests that when women are constrained, they are "like curst dogges: civilitie keepes them tyed all day time, but they are let loose at midnight; then they do most good or most mischeefe (I.ii. 181-3). Hence, to grant women their freedom is to release their excess. According to Bosola, inasmuch as this is canine, it is also carnal: because her incarceration "Makes [the Duchess] too passionately apprehend / Those pleasures she's kept from" (IV.i.14-15), she is "Like English Mastiffes, that grow feirce with tying" (13). Women are only malleable, therefore, if sexually satisfied; as Flamineo advises Brachiano: "Women are caught as you take Tortoises, / Shee must bee turn'd on her backe" (IV.ii.147-8). But in suggesting that Brachiano render Vittoria submissive, Flamineo's imagery becomes even more sexually explicit: Vittoria is also the "crocodile" whose "blemisht ... fame" is cured by "the bird with the pricke i'th head" (IV.ii. 230-2).

Women are not, however, represented as merely lascivious; they are also sexually manipulative. Flamineo presents Vittoria's "coynesse" as a disguise for "the superficies of lust most women have" (I.ii.18-19), and suggests that "Ladyes blush to heare that nam'd, which they do not feare

7 See *Works*, p. 320.

to handle", since "they are polliticke, they know [men's] desire is increas'd by the difficultie of injoying" (I.ii.19-21). To the lawyer's misogynous observation that "to sowe kisses, is to reape letchery, and I am sure a woman that will endure kissing is halfe won" (III.i.24-5), Flamineo responds: "True, her upper part by that rule; if you will win her nether part to, you know what followes" (26-7). Thus confirming woman as physically bisected and genitally dominated, Flamineo not only sexually objectifies her, but also inverts the mind/body hierarchy of male subjectivity. [8] Given the desire-driven nature of men at court, this is resoundingly ironic. And it is an irony enhanced by Vittoria's challenge to Monticelso at her trial. When she defies him with "sever head from body: / Weele part good frindes" (III.ii. 137-8), she, paradoxically, reunites the "inferior" body and the feminine with the rational. In other words, Vittoria asserts a body/mind harmony otherwise disrupted by Renaissance subjectivity. In the light of this, Flamineo's remark to Camillo, "Strange you should loose your Count" (I.ii.52), is especially revealing. By objectifying Vittoria as genitalia, Flamineo also represents her as her husband's mislaid property. Hence Vittoria, further reduced to an item of exchange, is not only retrieved and possessed by Brachiano, but is also the vehicle of Flamineo's "preferment" (I.ii.313).

Where Flamineo, in his role as Brachiano's pander, exploits misogyny to serve his ambition, this is paralleled in *The Duchess of Malfi* by Bosola's role as Ferdinand's spy. Charged with seeking evidence of the Duchess's "lust" and forced to see through the distorted lens of Ferdinand's repressed desire, he gazes upon the Duchess, wishing that

8 Flamineo's use of the word "nether" reflects the Renaissance view of the body which sees it in terms of the hierarchy of matter, hence the genitals, being below the head and the seat of reason, are inferior.

> A whirlewinde strike off these bawd-farthingalls,
> For, but for that, and the loose-bodied gowne,
> I should have discover'd apparently
> The young spring-hall cutting a caper in her belly.
>
> (*DM* II.i. 143-6)

His transference of the modifiers "bawd" and "loose" to her garments, and the sexual connotations implicit in his image of a vigorous foetus within her body, augment the misogynous view of the Duchess as essentially carnal. Ironically, where the Duchess is dressed to disguise her pregnancy, she *is* the physical manifestation of what Bosola sees metaphysically as the inauthenticity of material being: like the self-fashioned male subject, her appearance *is* disjunctive with her (physical) inner reality. [9] Similarly, when Bosola represents woman in general as antithetical to male power, her sexual laxity and duplicity are conflated with deceptive appearances: he tells Ferdinand that "There's no more credit to be given to th'face / Then to a sicke mans uryn, which some call / The physitians whore, because she cozens him" (I.i.223-5). Where empirical science proves wanting (or wanton), it is deviant woman who is to blame.

When, in *The White Devil*, Flamineo warns Lodovico, "It would doe well in stead of looking glasses / To set ones face each morning by a sawcer / Of a witches congealed bloud" (III.iii. 80-2), he is remarkably reflexive and self-subverting. In suggesting that the mirror has no value in verifying the self-fashioned identity, Flamineo subverts the Renaissance ideology of

9 This is further enhanced if the prevailing misogynous view of woman's body as an "abomination" is also taken into account. See Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989) pp.145-168. Hereafter cited as Miles.

subjectivity. But he also reveals that, as a reflection of that self-same ideology, his discourse is equally valueless. And where this is inadvertent and his correlating of woman with the diabolic is not, Flamineo shows the threat of the alien other as intensifying in direct relation to the depth of male anxiety. [10] This is shown to an even greater degree in Bosola's contempt for the old mid-wife: in presenting her as a threat to patriarchal order because of her diabolic use of artifice, he also betrays the deep anxiety which derives from the male subject's aetheticized, self-dramatized identity. As he sees it, the mid-wife's "scurvy face-physicke" (II.i.22) is owed to "the fat of Serpents, spawne of Snakes, Jewes spittle, and their yong childrens ordures" (II.i.32-4), all of which come from her "shop of witch-craft" (32). In addition, Bosola suggests that she not only defies the physician's art, but is also complicit in his degeneracy:

> I would sooner eate a dead pidgeon, taken from the soles of the feete of one sicke of the plague, then kisse one of you fasting: here are two of you, whose sin of your youth, is the very patrimony of the Physition, makes him renew his foote-cloth with the Spring, and change his high-priz'd curtezan with the fall of the leafe.
>
> (II.i.34-9)

Bosola's reference to her plurality, and his remark, "I do wonder you doe not loath your selves" (39), is as unconsciously self-referential as Flamineo is when equating false mirrors with witches' blood. For although it is female artifice for which the old woman is demonized and pluralized, Bosola betrays his disgust with his "making-up" as an actor. Thus

10 There is irony in this which may elude modern audiences. Since the actor playing the old lady would have been a boy, he would indeed have been "made-up" to appear as an old woman; quite the reverse of what Bosola alleges the old woman has done, which is slough her face of wrinkles. Thus Webster enhances the theme of artifice versus authenticity.

initiated by his revulsion for the old woman, Bosola's exposition on the "outward forme of man" (41), wherein from the "Colt, or Lambe, / ... Fawne, or Goate" (43-4) with limbs "resembling / A man" (44-5), he would "flye ... as a prodegy" (45), reveals an actor's abhorrence of his own chameleon identity as an even deeper existential anxiety. Bosola sees what he is not, yet yearns to be – unified and authentic.

Hence, where Flamineo's and Bosola's misogyny is strategic in their pursuit of economic reward, it is also psychologically determined: by placing women even further beyond the bounds of subjectivity than themselves, they gain the power they otherwise lack. As is made clear in Bosola's response to the old mid-wife, women provide the malcontent with a scapegoat for his self-contempt. Flamineo's reviling of Zanche as a "devill" (V.i. 86), and a "Witch" (V.i.144), as a further example, reveals Flamineo's lack of constancy, since he had "made to her some ... darke promise" from which he "seek[s] to flye ... like a frighted dog with a bottle at's taile" (V.i.149-51). Moreover, in belittling women's grief as "superstitious howling" (V.iv. 59) Flamineo, as his brother's murderer, makes them scapegoats for his repressed shame and guilt. Even more telling, however, is Flamineo's misogynous response to his sister's distress at Brachiano's death. Disguising his suppressed emotions, he does not pursue Vittoria off-stage with his support (V.iii. 176) but, instead, offers Francisco a discourse on women's tears as evidence of nothing but deceit and hypocrisy:

> Had women navigable rivers in their eies
> They would dispend them all; surely I wonder
> Why wee should wish more rivers to the Cittie,

> When they sell Water so goode cheape. Ile tell thee,
> These are but Moonish shades of greifes or feares,
> There's nothing sooner drie than womens teares.
> (V.iii 178-83)

Even more revealing, though, is Flamineo's response to Vittoria's *cri de coeur* , "O yee dissembling men!" (IV.ii. 178). By insisting "Wee suckt that, sister, / From womens brestes, in our first infancie" (178-9), Flamineo attributes his lack of authenticity to subversive matriarchal power. This is in marked contrast to the grieving Giovanni's remarks that his mother "gave [him] sucke, / And it should seeme by that shee deerely lov'd mee" (III.ii. 332-3), and shows Flamineo's repression of the maternal, the instinctive and the natural. In a parallel to this, when Bosola weeps for the Duchess, he asserts: "This is manly sorrow: / These teares, I am very certaine, never grew / In my Mothers Milke" (*DM* IV ii. 348-50). Like Flamineo, Bosola rejects the maternal; but in his shame at succumbing to "feminine" grief he authenticates this merging with the other as masculine. When viewed metadramatically, Bosola thus blurs the boundaries between other and not-other and collapses the gender polarities crucial to the Renaissance ideology of male subjectivity. It is doubly ironic therefore that Bosola should deny as "masculine" his "feminine" compassion, and do so for a woman who is a victim of the ideology he continues to sustain.

Inasmuch as Flamineo's and Bosola's misogyny reflects the repression of the other in the courts of Rome and Malfi, it has its precedence in that expressed by Erasmus and Machiavelli. By the former's account lust, which dispossesses men of physical and spiritual integrity,

economic power, social status, and reduces them to the bestial, is provoked by women. His misogyny expressed as much through the imagery of disease and degeneracy as any patristic writings,[11] Erasmus denies any correlation between love and sexual desire: lust is a "seductive pestilence" which

> takes away one's good reputation .... It exhausts one's patrimony; it destroys physical strength and beauty. It gravely harms one's health; it brings forth countless and loathsome diseases. It disfigures the flower of youth before its time; it hastens on ugly old age. It takes away the vigour of intelligence, dulls the sharpness of the mind, and introduces in us instead the mind of the beast. It calls us away irrevocably from all honourable pursuits and immerses man from head to foot in the muck, with the result that he likes to think of nothing but what is sordid, lowly, filthy.[12]

The climax to this diatribe is Erasmus's stated belief that it is "totally insane [for a man] to love, grow pale, waste away [and] shed tears" on account of a woman, since she is the "stinking whore" to whom he has become the "base suppliant".[13]

On the other hand, where Machiavelli's misogyny derives from his secular perspective, woman threatens as nature/Fortune. She is

> one of those raging rivers, which when in flood overflows the plains, sweeping away trees and buildings, bearing away the soil from place to place; everything

11 Jerome wrote: "woman's love in general is ... ever insatiable; put it out, it bursts into flame; give it plenty, it is again in need; it enervates a man's mind and engrosses all thought except for the passion which it feeds". See Miles, p.154.

12 Erasmus, p. 114.

13 Ibid.

> flies before it, all yield to its violence, without being able in any way to withstand it. [14]

But as "a lover of young men because they are less cautious, more violent and with more audacity command her",[15] Fortune is also masochistic. This contradiction between Fortune/nature which annihilates patriarchal power, and Fortune/woman who submits to it, is explained by Machiavelli's refusal to deprive men of free will; as he puts it:

> not to extinguish our free will, I hold it true that Fortune is the arbiter of one-half our actions, but that she still leaves us to direct the other half, or perhaps a little less.[16]

Hence autonomy is delusory, and freedom is at Fortune's indulgence.

Where Machiavelli posits the relationship between free will and determinism as sexual conflict, however, he reflects a tension that the Renaissance does not relax. Erasmus's "whore" is a sadist who tyrannizes men, but Machiavelli graces Fortune with the term "lover", and suggests that she welcomes her chastisement. As an incitement to pre-emptive violence in defence of male autonomy, his directive that "to keep [Fortune] under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her", [17] coupled with what is, clearly, an Erasmian horror of "ambiguity ... emotion,

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14 Machiavelli, pp. 197-8.

15 Ibid.,p.201.

16 Ibid., p.197.

17 Machiavelli, p.201

instinct, body [and] nature",[18] is remarkably applicable to the misogyny expressed by Flamineo and Bosola. With its source in the classical model,[19] augmented by patristic attitudes,[20] and exacerbated by the Renaissance tension between the participatory and the rational modes of consciousness, their misogyny can be thus contextualized. Webster's Renaissance subjects see women as the embodiment of what they repress and fear as a threat to their humanist subjectivity: psychologically determined impulses and the contingencies of the natural world. Thus abstracted, bestialized, objectified and denied metaphysical reality, women are, by their account, irrational, fraudulent, immoderate, and corrupt, as well as prodigious and the demonic. Where the Eve/Pandora paradigm of woman-as-scapegoat for mankind's suffering [21] is intensified by Renaissance formations of subjectivity and merges with Machiavelli's redefined Fortune of classical and medieval myth, woman becomes a truly

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18 Tarnas, p. 442.

19 The anti-woman, homosexual bias of Greek society is too well documented to warrant comment in detail here. Suffice to say that Aristotle believed that women did not acquire male sexual characteristics due to lack of heat. In addition, Galen wrote that "men are more perfect than women, by reason of their 'excess of heat' ... the male is a hotter version of the female, or to use the teleologically more appropriate order, the female is the cooler, less perfect version of the male". Miles, p.160.

20 Where the volume of misogynist writing on Eve's responsibility for the fall of mankind is overwhelming, Tertullian's address to woman-as-Eve is revealing:

> The curse God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships, you are the devil's gateway, you desecrated the fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you softened up with your cajoling words the man against whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, Adam, you broke him as if he were a mere plaything. *You* deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die!

See Marina Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983) p.58.

21 Keith Thomas states that witchcraft "served as a means of accounting for the otherwise inexplicable misfortunes of daily life ... where human impotence in the face of a variety of hazards was only too obvious". See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991) pp. 535-6.

prodigious threat.

Indeed, where the opening of *The White Devil* foregrounds Lodovico's abdication of moral responsibility for his actions, he attributes his banishment to contingency as represented by the pagan gods of Democritus and, more significantly, to contingency as Machiavellian Fortune. But just as Francisco sees lust as female, and wearing "her sharpe whippe / At her owne girdle" (*WD* II.i. 70-1), so Lodovico's "Fortune" is not the masochistic "lover" who submits to her oppressors, but the "whore" who overturns Machiavelli's "equal" allocation of power, and takes control. According to Lodovico:

> Fortun's a right whore:
> If she give ought, she deales it in smal percels,
> That she may take away all at one swope.
> (I.i. 4-6)

It is also in accord with Erasmian misogyny that Ferdinand, tyrannized by the "sharpe whippe" of lust, projects his guilt onto his sister. Obsessed with her sexuality, he describes her as "lusty" (I.i.325), warns her that remarriage would prove her "most luxurious" (284), and exploits her repartee in terms which reinforce his view of her as sexually deviant. To her submission that the value of diamonds accrues by their handling, Ferdinand replies: "Whores, by that rule, are precious" (288). Moreover, the Duchess's pregnancy is seen as confirmation of her sexual laxity: she is "a sister dampn'd, [and] loose i'th'hilts: / Growne a notorious Strumpet" (II.v.3-4).

In blaming "whores" for all that theatens male autonomy and

patriarchal power, Monticelso, like Ferdinand, displays a misogyny which seems directly drawn from the Erasmian and Machiavellian models. Where they are corrupt, aberrant and prodigious, whores are also the embodiment of contingency and the Antichrist:

> They are first,
> Sweete meates which rot the eater: In mans nostrill
> Poison'd perfumes. They are coosning Alcumy,
> Shipwrackes in Calmest weather. What are whores?
> Cold Russian winters, that appeare so barren,
> As if that nature had forgot the spring.
> They are the trew matteriall fier of hell,
> Worse then those tributes ith low countries payed,
> Exactions upon meat, drinke, garments, sleepe:
> I even on mans perdition, his sin.
> They are those brittle evidences of law
> Which forfait all a wretched mans estate
> For leaving out one sillable. What are whores?
> They are those flattering bels have all one tune
> At weddings, and at funerals; your ritch whores
> Are only treasuries by extortion fild,
> And empted by curs'd riot. They are worse,
> Worse then dead bodies, which are beg'd at gallowes
> And wrought upon by surgeons, to teach man
> Wherein hee is imperfect. Whats a whore?
> Shees like the guilty conterfetted coine
> Which who so eare first stampes it brings in trouble
> All the receave it.
>
> (III.ii. 80-102)

Such a *tour de force* of misogyny is, however, attenuated when seen in relation to the contents of Monticelso's black book. For among the "many devils" recorded there are spies, procurers, swindlers, usurers, thieves and murderers: the only satanic practice attributed specifically to women is that of being "Impudent baudes, / That go in mens apparell" (IV.i. 53-4).

In his condemnation of whores, Monticelso conflates female lust and contingency; when it comes to male subjectivity, however, he not only privileges lust's destructive power over contingency's, but also represents it as total:

> Wretched are Princes
> When fortune blasteth but a petty flower
> Of their unweldy crownes, or ravesheth
> But one pearle from their Scepter: but alas!
> When they to wilfull shipwrake loose good Fame,
> All Princely titles perish with their name.
> (II.i. 37-42)

Here, Monticelso speaks of Brachiano's lust. By implication, however, it is Vittoria in whom the ultimate power to destroy Brachiano's autonomy and status is vested; as the cause for Brachiano's abandonment of all that establishes his humanist subjectivity, she is also a threat to Brachiano's patriarchal power:

> It is a wonder to your noble friends,
> That you that have as 'twere entred the world
> With a free Scepter in your able hand,
> And have to th'use of nature well applyed

> High gifts of learning, should in your prime-age
> Neglect your awfull throne, for the soft downe
> Of an insatiate bed.
>
> (*WD* II.i.26-32)

Just as the "awful throne" connotes authority and institutional power as the masculine prerogative, so the descent into the domain of nature, sleep and the subconscious is affiliated with limitless female lust and the forfeiture of Brachiano's autonomy and rationality. Indeed, as Monticelso puts it, the restoration of subjectivity is conditional on Brachiano "awake[ning] from this lascivious dreame" ( 35).

If Monticelso confirms woman as correlative with degeneracy and irrationality, just as the male subject is with rationality and autonomy, the Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi*, similarly, sees the woman/subject antithesis in terms of freedom and entrapment. Hence the Duchess, given her male status as "prince", would be imprisoned by her own lust: the Cardinal tells her that "the marriage night / Is the entrance into some prison" (I.i. 310-11). Where this, ironically, prefigures the Duchess's incarceration as a woman, it also shows that she is, at once, subject and repressed other. Ferdinand's later expressed wish to contain his sister's lover until death (III.ii.103-5), however, verifies a further correlation of woman with death: just as Ferdinand's incestuous desire is destructive and self-destruction, so too is his sister's lust; by extension, this is also an orgasm/death correlation. Ferdinand transposes the loss of consciousness concomitant with female sexuality as "those joyes, / Those lustfull pleasures, [which] ... like heavy sleepes" (311-2), "fore-run mans mischiefe" (313).

But if men associate dreams and the subconscious with female sexuality, it is significant that the Duchess, as a prince "borne great" (427), is " forc'd to expresse [her] violent passions / In ridles, and in dreames" (I.ii. 431-2). But she is also "a yong widow" (443); hence, she acknowledges her dreams as an expression of her authenticity as a passionate woman, but as a prince they must be repressed. For this reason the Duchess's dream in which the diamonds from her "Coronet of State" (III.v.13) turn to pearls is symbolic and prophetic. Where this transformation represents the stripping of her "masculine" identity and public status as a "prince" (16), the pearls themselves, consistent with Antonio's interpretation, represent the Duchess's tears. Hence, it is not the prince, but the woman who later weeps; her tears are for the suffering and persecution she endures for the expression of her female sexuality.

By contrast Isabella, in *The White Devil*, strives to transcend her intrinsically "corrupt" nature as a woman, and empty her dreams of their power. In telling Brachiano "The oftner that we cast our reckonings up, / Our sleepes will be the sounder" (II.i. 152-3), she suggests that dreams are the site of a psyche troubled by sinful desires as well as by past transgressions. Vittoria, as an example of this, reveals her wish fulfilment that Camillo and Isabella be murdered. Significantly, it is in the wooing scene – thus establishing the correlation of female lust and the subconscious – that Vittoria tells Brachiano:

> As I sat sadly leaning on a grave,
> Checkered with crosse-sticks, their came stealing in
> Your Dutchesse and my husband; one of them
> A picax bore, th'other a Rusty spade,

> And in rough termes they gan to challenge me,
> About this *Eu*...
> They told me my entent was to root up
> That well-growne *Eu*, and plant i'th steed of it
> A withered blacke-thorne, and for that they vow'd
> To bury me alive ...
> .....
> When to my rescue there arose me thought
> A whirlewind, which let fall a massy arme
> From that strong plant,
> And both were strucke dead by that sacred *Eu*
> In that base shallow grave that was their due.
>
> (*WD* I.ii. 219-38)

In revealing her wish for the deaths of Camillo and Isabella, Vittoria conforms to the ideology of gender which posits the female subconscious and "deviant" sexuality as a source of male decline and social chaos. Yet, where Vittoria's dream provides Brachiano with a scapegoat for his proactive part in Isabella's and Camillo's murders, it gives a concrete, rather than abstract, example of how misogyny functions in sustaining male subjectivity. It is not Brachiano who is detained for the murder of Isabella and Camillo, but Vittoria, and she is not tried as a murderer, but as a "whore". Monticelso, enunciating the ideology which makes woman the ultimate source of social evil at the same time as it releases men from moral responsibility, states: "You know what Whore is: next the devell, Adultry, / Enters the devell, Murder" (III.ii. 109-110).

Monticelso's correlation of adultery and murder with "whore" and the Antichrist is a patriarchal validation of Flamineo's remarks made earlier in

the play in reference to Vittoria's dream. From the perspective of the Renaissance ideology of gender, Vittoria's admission that, in her dream, she was in a churchyard at "about the mid of night" (I.ii.216), and that "for all [her] terror / [She] could not pray" (232-3), confirms that her sublimated desire is satanic. Indeed, Flamineo's retort, "No, the divell was in your dreame" (233), followed by his observation that Vittoria is the "Excellent Divell" who "hath taught [Brachiano] ... / To make away his Dutchesse and her husband" (239-40), is the first hint that it is Vittoria who will be held responsible for Isabella's and Camillo's deaths. This demonizing of Vittoria is sustained by Brachiano, moreover, when he upbraids her for her imagined infidelity. As he gives Vittoria the apparently incriminating letter, he remarks: "You are reclaimed are you? Ile give you the bels / And let you flie to the devill" (IV. ii. 79-80).

Whereas flight normally connotes freedom and release from constraint, in the patriarchal, Machiavellian world of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* it is feminized and demonized as a threat to psychological and social control. When according to his brother, Ferdinand "flie[s] beyond [his] reason" (*DM* II.v.46), he is also transported "As men convai'd by witches, through the ayre / On violent whirle-windes" (II.v.50-51). This correlating of freedom with the demonic and the prodigious is, predictably, carried into the sphere of female sexuality; the Duchess is seen as not the victim of "Sorcery" (63), but its agent. She "doate[s] on some desertles fellow" (III.i. 65) because "The witch-craft lies in her rancke blood" (78). Projected onto her, this is Ferdinand's illicit desire and, just as earlier in the play he displays his father's poniard with the warning, "doe you see, / I'll'd be loth to see't looke rusty,'cause 'twas his (I.i. 317-18), so

here he sees her as a source of infection. Thus, in a fantasy by which he would simultaneously "cleanse" the "rust" of the patriarchal blade and purify the Duchess's blood, Ferdinand makes literal the misogyny which sexually objectifies and fragments the female body: he would "[hew] her to peeces" (II.v.31). In addition, to "purge [the] choller" (13) of his coexistent rage and lust, and "wipe ... out" (16) the knowledge of his sister's marriage and the images of her sexual activity, he would make a "spunge" of the Duchess's "bleeding heart" (15-16). What Ferdinand is saying, in effect, is that he wishes to purge himself.

If Ferdinand's chimeric blood-letting has connotations of the pagan sacrifice of the scapegoat, more historically immediate are his references to purification by fire. Since the burning of the witch, as the Renaissance equivalent to its pagan precedent, purges the community of satanic threat, the sublimated desire similarly to destroy his sister is apparent when Ferdinand tells his brother that they must "Apply desperate physicke: / We must not now use Balsamum, but fire" (23-4). Although he immediately follows this with a reiteration of his fixation with flowing blood – "The smarting cupping-glasse, for that's the meane / To purge infected blood" (25-6) – he builds the scene to a climax with his "starke made" (66) desire to sacrifice not only the Duchess, but also her imagined lover. Significantly, this would not be by public ritual: Ferdinand

> would have their bodies
> Burn't in a coale-pit, with the ventage stop'd,
> That their curs'd smoake might not ascend to Heaven:
> Or dippe the sheetes they lie in, in pitch or sulphure,
> Wrap them in't, and then light them like a match.

(II.v. 66-70)

Where Ferdinand, in a reference to sexual penetration, suggests that the squire "carries coles up, to her privy lodgings" (44), here, he sees both the Duchess and her lover as consumed in the act of coitus; thus, to burn in the "coale-pit" is to be consumed by the Duchess's genitals.

In contrast to Ferdinand, Brachiano sees his own destruction by female sexual power in terms of public ritual. Portraying himself as Vittoria's victim in pagan death rites, he protests:

> How long have I beheld the devill in christall?
> Thou hast lead mee, like an heathen sacrifice,
> With musicke, and with fatall yokes of flowers
> To my eternalle ruine.
>
> (IV. ii.84-8)

By locating Vittoria in a polytheistic and Dionysian world, Brachiano conceptualizes transgressing woman in an image which extends beyond a Christian-Satanic dichotomy; her otherness becomes pre-Christian and an increased threat. Accordingly, Brachiano's earlier hyperbolic declarations of being "lost" (I.ii.3,191) become more desperate; Vittoria now threatens him with "eternalle ruine" (84). In associating her not only with the satanic, but also the pagan world and thus removing himself from the reach of God's redemptive power, Brachiano can blame Vittoria for more than his loss of autonomy and status: she becomes the cause of the damnation of his immortal soul.

Where Vittoria's association with myth, nature and the supernatural

is demonized and placed in a pagan context by Monticelso and Brachiano, Isabella professes a Christian faith which does not preclude a belief in the supernatural. Having expressed the wish that Brachiano would "in time ... fix [his eyes] upon heaven" (II.i. 213), equally, she wishes to counter his "infected straying" (II.i. 18) with "magic":

> I do not doubt,
> As men to try the precious Unicornes horne
> Make of the powder a preservative Circle
> And in it put a spider, so these armes
> Shall charme his poyson, force it to obeying,
> And keepe him chast.
>
> (*WD* II.i. 13-18)

Since her "magic" proves ineffectual, however, Isabella is subjected to male contempt (266-68). But as Brachiano's imperviousness to Monticelso's discourse has shown (II.i. 43-92), appeals to rational humanism are also useless in deterring Brachiano from pursuing what is, from the patriarchal perspective, the destruction of his subjectivity. What this reveals is the power of libidinous drives to override an ideological construction of subjectivity which attempts to deny them.

Likewise, in *The White Devil*, the ineffectualness – indeed irrelevance – of rational consciousness is also shown in relation to death: it cannot express, or measure grief any more than it can contain lust. Appropriately, the emotional repression associated with rational humanist (male) subjectivity is placed in a binary opposition with the spontaneous expression of participatory consciousness as female. When Cornelia and

her women bind Marcello's corpse – thus providing a visual recapitulation of Flamineo's silkworm imagery – they affirm not only the vulnerability of the powerless at court, but also the role of participatory consciousness in disrupting Renaissance subjectivity. Here, the dramatic representation of matriarchal harmony, juxtaposed with death, music, flowers and herbs, can be seen as the physical realization of Brachiano's earlier metaphor. As Francisco reports to Flamineo:

> I found [the women] winding of *Marcello's* coarse;
> And there is such a solemne melodie
> 'Tweene dolefull songes, teares, and sad elegies:
> Such, as old grandames, watching by the dead,
> Were wont t'out-weare the nights with.
>
> (*WD* V.iv. 50-3)

If this is what Flamineo calls "superstitious howling" (59), it is the non-rational discourse that he and Brachiano fear and repress. Expressed not with gnomic cynicism, or humanist rhetoric, Marcello's death-rites are performed by women who sing and speak of a numinous world from which the psyche is not dislocated. Cornelia "would have ... herbes grow up in [Marcello's] grave' (61) since " "T'will keepe [her] boy from lightning" (64). Furthermore, she ties a garland of bay leaves about Marcello's head, offers Flamineo "Rosemarie ... Rue ... Heart's-ease" (71-2), and "Cousleps-water ... for the memorie" (82-3), and sings his great-grandmother's song in which nature and human suffering are interpenetrated:

> *Call for the Robin-Red-brest and the wren,*

*Since ore shadie groves they hover,*
*And with leaves and flowres doe cover*
*The friendlesse bodies of unburied men.*
*Call unto his funerall Dole*
*The Ante, the field mouse, and the mole*
*To reare him hillockes, that shall keepe him warme,*
*And (when gay tombes are rob'd) sustaine no harme,*
*But keepe the wolfe from thence, that's foe to men,*
*For with his nailes hee'l digt them up agen*

(89-98)

Significantly, when Cornelia's reference to her "white hand" (76), which "'tis speckled! h'as handled a toad sure"(82), strikes Flamineo's conscience, he can only say "I would I were from hence" (84).

From a shift in focus from earthly goals to the other of death, woman and nature, Flamineo experiences authentic feeling. Thus this scene's function can be seen as a dramatic equivalent to Holbein's anamorphic skull: where the reorientated gaze which restores it to plenitude also effaces the ambassadors, Flamineo's vision of the other results in his wish to remove himself physically from its presence. The relevance of Holbein's symbolism to *The White Devil* can be reinforced, moreover, by Cornelia's recollection that her grandmother "was wont, when she heard the bell tolle, to sing ore unto her lute" (86-7). Where the broken string of Holbein's lute suggests a sundering of present and past, the past of which Cornelia speaks is likewise eclipsed. In addition, where the lute is a symbol of the polarization of rational and participatory consciousness, it is, as represented in both Webster's tragedies, also that of male and female. Indeed, in *The Duchess of Malfi* , when the Cardinal uses music as an

analogy for the ideal of pyschological harmony, paradoxically, he also exploits it as representing female lust. As well as urging Ferdinand to put himself "In tune" (II.v. 62), the Cardinal suggests that Julia *is* a lute. Since her husband is an ineffectual lover, she is the instrument upon which her husband "hath a little fingring ... / Yet cannot tune" (II.iv. 35-6). If Julia's sexuality is discrete and discordant, the Cardinal will bring it to order and harmony.

Nonetheless, Julia, as an adulteress, remains a threat. Her deviant sexuality and her proliferative sound, together, threaten male power, and demand that she be silenced. Hence, from the Cardinal's ideological perspective, music expresses the harmony of a world in which the otherness of woman is a jangling discord to be brought under male control. It is significant, therefore, that while acting for Flamineo, it is Julia who will "winde [her] tongue about [the Cardinal's] heart, / Like a skeine of silke" (V.ii.214-5). In the context of her adulterous relationship with the Cardinal, her words, allusive to Eve and the serpent, [22] are revealing. By internalizing the misogynist discourse with its association of a woman's serpentine tongue with lust, inconstancy, and threat, she verifies her function as scapegoat, and indeed, suffers a scapegoat's death. In an earlier exchange, the projection of male fears onto woman-as-other is laid bare and intensified when the Cardinal, in blaming Julia for his lust and inconstancy, accuses her of projection:

*Julia* . You have prevailed with me

Beyond my strongest thoughts: I would not now

22 Hans Baldung Grien's painting *The Fall* ( 1511), shows a serpent observing Adam and Eve, whilst coiled around a tree. A forked tongue protrudes from its open mouth. See Miles, p.128.

Find you inconstant.

*Cardinall.* Doe not put thy selfe

To such a voluntary torture, which proceedes

Out of your owne guilt

*Julia.* How ( my Lord?)

*Cardinall.* You feare

My constancy, because you have approov'd

Those giddy and wild turnings in your selfe.

(II.iv. 6-12)

When the cardinal poisons Julia because he is "weary of her; and by any meanes / Would be quit off (V.ii. 221-2), he also destroys the woman in whom he sees his own unstable and capricious nature.

The "whores" who weary the Cardinal in *The White Devil,* however, are those who are "flattering bels [with] all one tune " (III.ii. 93). What Monticelso projects here is the sycophancy at court; but the fact that their "tune" is monotonic and played "At weddings, and at funerals" (94) also confirms "whores" as a subversive presence at the Christian ceremonies which ritualize sex and death. Indeed, where this statement is made in the course of Vittoria's trial, itself a ritual (albeit secular), it is underscored by Monticelso's remark to Vittoria that her "trade instructs [her] language" (III.ii. 62). Likewise if Cornelia, as the spokeswoman for Christian prohibitions on adultery,also speaks "one tune", it is one that instructs: she reminds Brachiano of his social responsibility as a prince (*WD* I.ii. 271-3). Since it is not his actions, but her " rash tongue" that "Hath rais'd a fearefull and prodigious storme", Cornelia will be "the cause of all ensuing harme" (*WD* I.ii. 289-91). Brachiano thus blames her for the possible consequences of his sexual transgression and deems her "mad"

(282).

The "madness" whereby Cornelia reminds Brachiano of his responsibilities as a father and prince, is based, however, on Cornelia's fear for the patriarchal line. Where thus she internalizes the patriarchal discourse, she sees " our house / Sinking to ruine" (I.ii.201-2). And her view of adulterous lust as a threat to patriarchal power is augmented by the patriarchal notion of deviant woman's power to subvert primogeniture. [23] If, according to Francisco, Vittoria will "One summer ... beare unsavory fruite" (III.ii.187), it is Giovanni's (hence, Francisco's) legitimate claim to power which is threatened by Vittoria's and Brachiano's union. But in addition to this, should Brachiano fail in his paternal duty to fashion Giovanni to humanist subjectivity, it is Vittoria's "infection" which is ultimately to blame. Without the Aristotelian habituation which "makes a child a man" (II.i.136), Giovanni will degenerate into the "beast" (137) who is other to "civilized" patriarchal society. Thus woman, bestialized, becomes the projected threat to patriarchal continuity; whether as the bearer of "unsavory fruit" (187) or the subverter of ideological inculcation, she "infects" the male line.

That the fear of the bestial is ubiquitous in the male subject is revealed in the many references to woman, both as, and in relation to, animals and birds. When Bosola hears the sounds of the Duchess in

23 Among the various Aristotelian theories regarding woman's generative function (or *mal* function) which pervaded Renaissance scientific and theological thinking, was the belief that monstrous births were a result of the transgression of sexual ethics. In addition,works such as *De conceptua et generatione hominis* , by Jacob Rueff, the writings of Tommaso Garzoni, and Paré in the 16th century, and Gaspard Bauhin in the early 17th, all cite such transgressions as "immoderate coitus", "disorderly and violent copulation' and "evil concupiscence" as causes of monstrous births. As important is intercourse "without law", of which Vittoria is clearly culpable. See Niccoli, Ottavia.' "Menstruum Quasi Monstruum": Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century'", Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero eds., *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, c.1990) pp. 1-25.

labour, he associates her with creatures which, in turn, represent the isolation of the melancholic:

> Sure I did heare a woman shreike: list, hah?
> And the sound came (if I receiv'd it right)
> From the Dutchesse lodgings:
> .....
> List againe:
> It may be 'twas the mellencholly bird,
> (Best friend of silence, and of solitarines)
> The Oowle, that schream'd so—.
>
> (*DM* II.iii. 1-9)

Significantly, here, Bosola is alone and in a darkness scarcely penetrated by the light of his lantern. If he is reminded of a universe which evades human control, it is one inhabited by the creatures with whom a labouring woman is interconnected. But where Bosola's interconnection of woman with the natural world has a metaphysical overtone, Ferdinand's association of his sister with the bestial is direct and specific. Doubting that the Duchess's children "were ever christned" (III.iii. 62), he calls them "Cubbs" (IV. i. 33); as such the killing of the younger two children is "The death / Of young Wolffes, [which] is never to be pittied" (IV.ii.246). Where, as Brachiano puts it in *The White Devil*, "Woman to man / Is either a God or a wolfe" (IV. ii. 88-9), the Duchess is clearly seen by Ferdinand as the latter. But Vittoria, as the polar opposite of male subjectivity's all-seeing, soaring "eagle" is also associated with flesh which is worthless, fetid and earthbound: she is a "Pole-cat" (*WD* II.i. 5), "paltry mutton" (I.ii. 89), and a "dunghill bird" (II.i. 51).

Whereas the bestialization of woman establishes her at the subhuman level in the hierarchy of being, her objectification and fragmentation as both discrete organic items and natural phenomena, deny her physical wholeness. Brachiano, for example, viciously denies Vittoria subjectivity when, in a jealous rage, he dismisses her as "changeable stuffe" (IV.ii. 47) whose "loose thoughtes / Scatter like quicke-silver"(97-8). Matching this with references to her physical fragmentation, Brachiano then sees Vittoria as dismembered and objectified parts for him to claim. He insists, "Are not those matchlesse eies ... and this lip mine?" (129-130), and refers to "That hand, that cursed hand, which [he has] wearied / With doting kisses!" (95). The latter reference recalls Isabella's "one" (II.i.67) hand given by Francisco to Brachiano in marriage; it is also the hand from which Brachiano removes Isabella's wedding ring. This image of a dismembered hand is repeated in *The Duchess of Malfi* when the Duchess has her ring torn from her finger, and when she takes from Ferdinand the "dead" hand of Antonio. As a metaphor for the breaking of the unified "body" of the Pauline marriage, these images of dismemberment also deny woman metaphysical reality. Thus they emphasis the materialist focus of the male subject and correlate his existential inauthenticity with his inability to love. Where the ultimate focus of human love should be, in Platonic-Augustinian terms, on the immutability and eternality of God, these images of fragmentation express, in the profoundest sense, the consequences of ideological – hence materialist – constructs of subjectivity. Where the metaphysical ground of being is denied it leads to its denial in others and with horrifying consequences.

Brachiano's images of dismemberment, however, are not the metaphorical, or physical realization of a metaphysical idea; deriving from his fear of contingency and loss of control, they are psychologically, and egocentrically located. After wishing to open Francisco's letter "were't her heart" (IV.ii.22), and then to cut Vittoria into "Atomies" (41), he would "let th'irregular North-winde sweepe her up / And blow her int' his nosthrils (42-4). Insofar as this image of Vittoria's dismemberment confirms that she disrupts Brachiano's autonomy, it also reveals his wish to relocate her, as other, within the cosmos. And since he construes the north wind as masculine, Brachiano, metaphorically, takes control; by reducing Vittoria to discrete pieces, she becomes manipulable. Furthermore, when this image is viewed in relation to Lodovico's as he kills Vittoria – "O thou hast bin a most prodigious comet, / But Ile cut of your traine" (V.vi. 210-11) – it becomes clear that the atomization and destruction of woman has its source in the male subject's urge to gain both microcosmic and macrocosmic control.

In slaughtering Vittoria, Lodovico also shatters the "christall" which surrounds the "devill" within. This is also the symbolic destruction of his own aesthetic but false exterior. For although he insists, at the end of *The White Devil,* "I do glory yet, / That I can call this act mine owne: ... I limb'd this night-peece and it was my best" (V.vi. 288-92), his ambiguous play on the authentic/inauthentic polarity suggests that, in fact, his part in the play was not his own. This has, of course, metadramatic overtones: "Lodovico" *is* a part played by an actor, but to which "night-peece" does Lodovico refer – his "act" *as* Lodovico, or "Lodovico" ? That the answer is undoubtedly both reinforces the idea that subjectivity is as authentic as

the actor's role, which means not authentic at all. But where, in destroying Vittoria, Lodovico expunges anxieties which are psychologically based, Monticelso's attack reveals a disquiet whose source is theological. This occurs in the trial scene when his abstraction of whores as "counterfetted coin" shifts to his specific reference to Vittoria as a "counterfet [Jewel]" (III.ii. 141). Given that "jewel" has connotations of virginity, and Vittoria behaves without shame or penitence for her adultery, she is seen as fraudulent. [24] Monticelso expresses this in a biblical allusion [25] whereby Vittoria's aesthetic exterior which seems whole (and wholesome), masks her real "whore's" state:

> You see my Lords what goodly fruict she seemes,
> Yet like those apples travellers report
> To grow where *Sodom* and *Gomora* stood,
> I will but touch her and you straight shall see
> Sheele fall to soote and ashes.
>
> (*WD* III.ii.63-7)

Hence, in terms of patristic constructions of woman whereby her "genuine" state – as a virgin, through marriage or chaste widowhood – is

24 Erasmus reaffirms and augments patristic attitudes to widowhood as a state where, in addition to the virtue of sexual abstinence, the woman must also be active in her social role as moral guide to virgins and young married women:

> It is the role of widows to instruct those recently married or about to be married as to how they should conduct themselves towards their husbands, towards their children, towards the members of their households, towards their in-laws and other relatives. Theirs is the responsibility for instructing virgins and demonstrating to them how best to act so as to preserve their character and reputation. And in this regard, plainly, both virginity and marriage must pay homage to widowhood, by those whose advice and authority both are aided, for just as we kiss the bloom of chastity in virgins and admire the service performed by matrons, so we venerate the authority of widows.

See Erasmus, p. 203.

25 See *Works* p.295.

transcendent of her corrupt essence as Eve, Vittoria is "false": she chooses to be "true" to her "corrupt" self. But even then, this notion of "authentic" woman is, in turn, an ideological construction, albeit theologically based, and Vittoria remains "inauthentic". This becomes clear when Monticelso suggests of Vittoria that "If the devill / Did ever take good shape, behold his picture" (III.ii. 216-17). As the representation of the devil personified, Vittoria becomes the simulation of yet another simulation and woman's authentic being disappears in the eternal regress of parallel mirror reflections.

When Cariola tells the Duchess of Malfi that she looks "Like to [her] picture in the gallery, / A deale of life in shew, but none in practise" (*DM* IV.ii. 32-3), she reverses Monticelso's analogy of a living woman as a representation. Instead, the Duchess resembles the status of her portrait; the loss of "life" is that of the woman of "flesh, and blood" (I.i. 439) and not the "prince". As she tells Antonio: "'Tis not the figure cut in Allablaster / Kneeles at [her] husbands tombe" (I.i. 440-441). The audience's first impressions of the Duchess, however, are of a woman of such madonna-like virtue that "all sweet Ladies [should] breake their flattring Glasses, / And dresse themselves in her" (192-3). Spoken by Antonio before the Duchess appears on stage, these words are the climax to a speech in which he presents her as the ideal of a Renaissance Christian widow. As such, she is chaste, modest, economical of speech and miraculously revivifying:

> her discourse, it is so full of Rapture,
> You onely will begin then to be sorry
> When she doth end her speech: and wish (in wonder)
> She held it lesse vaine-glory, to talke much,

> Then you pennance, to heare her: whilst she speakes,
> She throwes upon a man, so sweet a looke,
> That it were able raise one to a Galliard
> That lay in a dead palsey; and to doate
> On that sweete countenance: but in that looke,
> There speaketh so divine a continence,
> As cuts of all lascivious, and vaine hope.
> Her dayes are practis'd in such noble vertue,
> That sure her nights (nay more her very Sleepes)
> Are more in Heaven, than other Ladies Shrifts.
>
> (I.i. 178-91)

That such spiritualized asexuality is soon undercut by the appearance of a woman who is articulate, assertive and sexually aware is particularly ironic; as the later mirror scene reveals, she is an exemplar not of madonna-like humility, but of the pride and vanity associated with the self-dramatized Renaissance prince.

Indeed, it is as both a woman and a prince that, in III.ii, the Duchess gazes into her mirror, noting:

> Doth not the colour of my haire ' gin to change?
> When I waxe gray, I shall have all the Court
> Powder their haire, with Arras, to be like me.
>
> (58-60)

Where Keith Sturgess is right to suggest that this scene represents "a Renaissance moral emblem of ... the vain woman",[26] he ignores the fact

26 Sturgess, p. 114.

that the gaze of this "vain woman" is also the self-constituting gaze of the self-dramatizing prince. When Ferdinand, in the mirror scene, presents the Duchess with the poniard, her response "whether I am doom'd to live, or die, / I can doe both like a Prince" (III. ii. 70-1), reasserts the masculine persona she had established soon after Antonio's encomium. Moreover, Antonio is summoned to her presence when she is making her will, "as 'tis fit Princes should / In perfect memory" (362-3), and it is as a "prince" that she appoints him as her steward (369). Moreover, it is as one "borne great" (427) that the Duchess woos him, and, significantly, this is in terms which are military (I.i.330-4). Furthermore when, in the absence of Church ritual, the Duchess marries Antonio, it is she who places the ring on his finger, raises him when he kneels and initiates the ritualized kiss. And although this secular marriage conforms to Renaissance practice, her remarks "How can the Church build faster? / We now are man and wife, and 'tis the Church / That must but eccho this (I.i. 474-6) are, from a theological perspective, presumptuous. As disturbing is the Duchess's intention to "faigne a Pilgrimage / To our lady of *Loretto* " (III.ii. 307-8). Where to "faigne" is the princely prerogative, Cariola's warning, "I do not like this jesting with religion" (318), is met with a prince's contempt for the feminine: the Duchess tells Cariola, "thou art a superstitious foole" (319).

Yet, Cariola's observation – "Whether the spirit of greatnes, or of woman / Raigne most in her, I know not" (I.i.487-8) – focusses on what she sees as the Duchess's bifurcated identity. Thus the Duchess's remark, "Let old wives report / I wincked, and chose a husband" (I.i. 334-5), may be construed as either her princely indifference to matriarchal judgement, or as a woman's appeal to matriarchal support in her

defiance of patriarchal constraints. Indeed, when in choosing her lover, the Duchess exercises her prerogative as a "masculine" prince, she is seen, from a Renaissance perspective, as a whore. And where, from that same perspective, a prince's humanist education is lauded, her *woman's* knowledge of law and Latin – used by the Duchess to instigate her marriage (I.i.462) – is, by contrast, to be condemned. [27] Furthermore, when placed in its Jacobean stage context, where she is a boy playing a woman who asserts herself as male, the Duchess's blurred gender is problematized still further. Her "male" identity is no less authentic than that of "real" men; conversely, a "real" male identity is as inauthentic asserted by a woman as by a man. Where this unmasks the performative male subject, it also reveals the absence of authentic female subjectivity; as the Duchess puts it: "I account this world a tedious Theatre, / For I doe play a part in't 'gainst my will" (IV.i. 82-3). And although her remark is made in despair after seeing what she believes are the corpses of Antonio and her children, its psychological significance does not outweigh the ontological. In terms of Renaissance gender ideology whereby the Duchess must feign her identity as a prince, she is also denied authentic subjectivity as a woman.

But the Duchess, as Ferdinand's twin sister, is also, biologically, half of a plural, or divided identity. As such, she is the repressed and desired other more than any other woman in either tragedy: she is the *real* embodiment of the other. But if, at another level, the bifurcated Duchess and Ferdinand are a divided whole desiring reunification, they can be seen

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27 According to Vives it should invoke her to speak of "nothing ... but that which appertaineth unto the fear of God". Vives's authority is, in turn, St. Jerome's writing on St. Paul. See Foster Watson ed. *Vives and the Renascence Education of Women* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912) p.56 .

as referential to Aristophanes' myth in *The Symposium.* Ferdinand's desire for reunification can, then, likewise be seen as corrupted Eros. But there is yet another level at which the Duchess's and Ferdinand' s roles can be seen, and that is as a perversion of the merging of "one flesh", as it occurs in the Pauline marriage. [28] If this underscores, from a Christian perspective, the illicit nature of Ferdinand's desire, it has other implications. Antonio's marriage to the Duchess, thus, is the achieved violation of a Christian marriage, since, in his role as husband, Antonio is a "counterfeit" man. This is shown, when, in response to the Duchess's promise to protect him from her brothers, Antonio says, "These words should be mine, / And all the parts you have spoke" (I.i.457-8). Although he speaks as an actor whose role has been usurped, when viewed from a Pauline perspective, the implication is that Antonio's and the Duchess's marriage does not, ultimately, represent the metaphorical union of Christ with his church.

That the Duchess's marriage is not a merging of flesh, but an inversion of the subject/other dynamic as it exists in the Roman court is supported, moreover, by evidence of Antonio's affiliation with the feminine throughout *The Duchess of Malfi.* If, as Bosola suggests, it is "womanish, [to be] fearefull" (V.v. 101), the anxiety and sense of being overwhelmed by events that Antonio displays *is* feminine. An example of this is shown by his absence from the scene when Ferdinand threatens the Duchess with the poniard. Although armed, Antonio only reappears as Ferdinand

28 Ephesians 5.31. Paul also states: "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church", Ephesians, 5. 28-9. In addition, "the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church", Ephesians, 5.23. Where there is a disjunction between the Pauline view of one flesh and the husband as "head" of the marriage, this is not inconsistent with Webster's critique of male inauthenticity and the repression of the other.

withdraws, and then, in the company of Cariola. Dramatically, in terms of the play's constructions of the masculine, this does nothing to enhance a view of him as anything other than ineffectual. This is underpinned by the near-panic he shows earlier in II.iii. Here, Antonio's fear is palpable: his uncertain "whose there? what art thou? speake" (10), draws Bosola to reply: "Put not your face, nor body / To such a forc'd expression of feare" (11-12). Bosola's allusions to acting notwithstanding, the clear inference is that, as the Duchess gives birth, Antonio experiences a near-loss of control. This is confirmed, too, by another remark of Bosola's – this time free of acting imagery. He tells Antonio: "Me thinkes 'tis very cold, and yet you sweat. / You looke wildly" (19-20). Moreover, when Antonio's nose bleeds and he drops his son's horoscope, Bosola's view of him is proven accurate; Antonio remarks:

> One that were superstitious, would count
> This ominous, when it meerely comes by chance.
> Two letters, that are wrought here, for my name,
> Are drown'd in blood.
>
> (43-46)

The superstitious response is clearly his; thus aligned with Cariola, Antonio is by implication what the Duchess calls a "superstitious foole" (III.ii.319), and the feminine other to her self-asserted prince's persona.

Where, in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the paradoxes of gender in relation to subjectivity are revealed in the tripartite relationship of Ferdinand, the Duchess and Antonio, they are, in *The White Devil,* focussed on Vittoria. This is especially so at her trial in which, if it is seen as a play within a

play, she refuses to play her prescribed roles as "whore" and "widow". Asserting an "authenticity" lacking in her antagonists, Vittoria does not appear in "mourning habit" (III.ii.123), "scandals ... proceedings" (130) with her "scorne and impudence" (123), and, to extend the theatrical analogy, sabotages the performances of her fellow actors. Undercutting the lawyer's opening plea in Latin by asking "Whats he?" (11), she then requests that he "speake his usuall tongue" since

> amongst this auditory
> Which come to heare my cause, the halfe or more
> May bee ignorant in't.
>
> (15-16)

By appealing to her audience, Vittoria forges a link with them that breaks through the barrier of artifice which normally exists between performer and spectator. Similarly, when she apostrophizes charity as "seldom found in scarlet"(71-2), she reverses Monticelo's suggestion that she is not appropriately dressed for her role as widow, and suggests that it is he who wears the wrong costume. It is in her response to Monticelso's exposition of "whore", however, that Vittoria most effectively subverts self-dramatization. If Monticelso's "whore" is a "carracter [which] scapes [her] " (102), it is because, as an ideologically constructed role, it is so abstract and multifarious that it is impossible to perform. Vittoria makes the point that to be playable a role must have unity and psychological versimilitude. Thus, as a kind of archimedean point against which mimesis is measured, Vittoria establishes an authentic stability in a "play" whose parts are either miscast or badly written. Hence, when she

rebuts Monticelso's accusation that she is false, she suggests not only that she has an authentic inner reality which is of such depth that it is beyond the reach of patriarchal power, but also that such power is self-subverting:

> *Monticelso.* Well, well such counterfet Jewels
> Make trew on's oft suspected.
> *Vittoria.* You are deceaved.
> For know that all your strickt combined heads,
> Which strike against this mine of diamondes,
> Shall prove but glassen hammers, they shall breake;
> These are but faigned shadowes of my evels.
> Terrify babes, my Lord, with painted devils,
> I am past such needlesse palsy; for your names
> Of Whoore and Murdresse, they proceed from you,
> As is a man should spit against the wind,
> The filth returnes in's face.
>
> (142- 151)

Vittoria is right; as Webster shows, in both tragedies, the "filth" of gender ideology which represses the other also represses the authentic self and is ultimately self-annihilating.

But when Vittoria turns the patriarchal discourse back on her accusers, she declares that because a "womans poore revenge / ... dwels but in the tongue" (283-4), she "Must personate masculine vertue" (135). As Gunby points out, her use of the word "personate" is "ambiguous in its implications" since

> [Webster's] contemporaries acknowledged that 'masculinity' of mind or soul might be found in women ... However, **personate** was used in widely divergent

> senses at this time and while [Webster] may mean 'represent,symbolize, typify' ... or 'personify' the word was also commonly used pejoratively, as 'fraudulently pass oneself off as' ... and 'feign, counterfeit'.29

Since Vittoria's rhetorical skill is undeniable, and the lawyer's accusation that she "Know's not her tropes nor figures, nor is perfect / In the accademick derivation / Of Grammaticall elocution" (III.ii.40-2) is false, her performance, or impersonation, has the ring of "authenticity" which *is* "male". Vittoria's arguments, contrived to persuade, thus use "logic" as spurious as Monticelso's:

> Condemne you me for that the Duke did love mee,
> So may you blame some faire and christall river
> For that some melancholike distracted man
> Hath drown'd himselfe in't,
>
> (203-6)

In likening herself to a river in which a man drowns, Vittoria usurps the misogynist discourse: she defines herself as the all-enveloping other akin to the "insatiate bed" of Monticelso's analogy. In this she is as guilty of "masculine vertue" as her adversaries, and thus condemns herself as a "whore" in their terms. In her use of the word "christall", however, the audience is reminded of her "authentic" function: multi-faceted, she reflects back the multiple otherness constructed and repressed by male subjectivity. If the "filth" of misogyny returns, significantly, to a man's face, it is because he sees it mirrored in Vittoria. An example of this is when Monticelso suggests of Vittoria that "Were there a second Paradice

29 See *Works*, p.298.

to loose / This Devell would betray it" (70-1), and that as the devil's representation Vittoria is "*his* picture" (217, emphasis added). Thus he produces a demonic parody of ontological plenitude which blends Eve, serpent and Satan, and Vittoria is patriarchally endowed with the reunified female/male being the Renaissance subject lacks. The "Devell", however, is the male component.

Isabella, in accord with the Pauline view of marriage as one flesh, chooses to be at one with Brachiano's guilt and publicly takes responsibility for his breaking of the marriage bond. Thus the death of a woman who seems to fulfil the ideological imperatives as the chaste wife has connotations of martyrdom: Isabella dies before Brachiano's portrait, as if in worship before an altarpiece. Yet, in stating her intention to "worke peace" (II.i.216) between her husband and brother, Isabella refers explicitly to herself as both playwright and actor: she "will make / [Her] selfe the author of [Brachiano's] cursed vow" (216-17) and "performe this sad insuing part" (224). Consequently, when she "*flies into a passion* " (225.01), the audience are fully aware that they are witnessing an actor's performance-within-a-performance. This is not so for Isabella's on-stage audience; they have no doubt that what they witness is genuine. With its images of violence, mutilation and corruption, 30 her simulated anger as the wronged wife is exemplary:

> O that I were a man, or that I had power
>
> To execute my apprehended wishes,

30 Since Isabella's images of mutilation seem to be a direct allusion to nuns' reported custom of cutting off their noses and lips as a protection against rape, they also suggest de-sexualization. See Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation", *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Mary Beth Rose ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986) pp.29-72.

> I would whip some with scorpions ...
> To dig the strumpets eyes out, let her lye
> Some twenty monethes a dying, to cut off
> Her nose and lippes, pull out her rotten teeth,
> Preserve her flesh like *Mummia*, for trophies
> Of my just anger: Hell, to my affliction,
> Is meere snow-water.
>
> (II.i. 242-50)

This vitriolic outburst, followed by a re-enactment of the earlier inverted marriage ritual where, in addition to kissing Brachiano's hand and removing his wedding ring, Isabella vows she will never again lie with him, is of such power that Francisco is convinced that Isabella has "Turn'd fury" (244) and is a "foolish, mad, / And jealous woman" ( 263-4).

Yet Joan Lord Hall is of the opinion that Isabella's performance as the enraged and vengeful wife is too resolutely and convincingly acted for it to express alien emotions. She considers that "the insistent rhythms and graphic diction ... carry more weight than do [Isabella's] earlier protestations of selfless devotion to Bracciano".[31] Tantamount to suggesting that the actor's role is inseparable from his or her identity – clearly a contradiction – such a suggestion also fails to account for Webster's tragedies as a critique of the self-dramatized identity. Hence it is important to see Isabella's "role", like Vittoria's at her trial, as a dialectical interrogation of gender and identity. The manner in which Isabella-turned-termagant explicitly refers to retributive violence and mutilation as male prerogatives suggests that she is no less subversive of

31 See Joan Lord Hall, *The Dynamics of Role-playing in Jacobean Tragedy* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1991) p. 139.

gender ideology than the Duchess or Vittoria: where her tirade against Vittoria employs images of death and decay it recapitulates her rejection by Brachiano and prefigures Monticelso's exposition on "whore". Furthermore, when paralleled with Brachiano's outbursts against Vittoria, or Ferdinand's against the Duchess, her lines become intensely parodic of *male* rhetoric. In addition, Isabella knows that for her performance to convince the men in her presence she must fashion herself to fit their construction of woman; by appropriating their discourse she thus fulfils male perceptions of female anger. This also suggests, however, that while playing her part in exposing the self-fashioned identity as artifical and performative, Isabella, to a degree, acquiesces in her oppression. But if this is so, her parting words, profoundly moving, cut across all artifice and challenge ideology: "Unkindnesse do thy office, poore heart breake; / ... Those are the killing greifes which dare not speake" (II.i. 275-6).

Where Isabella's words are reminiscent of Edgar's at the close of *King Lear,*[32] they are a powerful rejection of language disconnected from authentic feeling; but since she "dare not" speak at all of her grief, she reminds us that, in the world of *The White Devil,* authentic feeling, seen as other and feminine, is repressed. Thus her assuming of the role of scapegoat foreshadows not only her subsequent murder, but also those of all the women in both plays. Julia's performance in *The Duchess of Malfi* as a "wanton" (V.ii.162) who is "in love" with Bosola (152), however, strikes at the core of the self-fashioned subject's pathology. In claiming that her "love" for Flamineo is induced by "love-powder" (150) given to her

32 As Edgar says, we should "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say", (V.iii.322). William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* ed. G.K. Hunter (London: Penguin Books,1988).

by other women (149), she denies the capacity to "love" as an intrinsic part of the psyche. Thus she speaks the language of the misogynous discourse in which love is repressed as irrational and antithetical to subjectivity. Again, when Julia "threatens" Flamineo with a pistol (145) and declares, "The onely remedy to do me good, / Is to kill my longing" (154-5), she speaks with a male voice. Like Isabella, she foreshadows her own murder, but she also, compellingly, articulates her murderer's psychopathology. In killing her, the Cardinal "cures" what he calls "[his] lingring consumption" (V.ii.220); in other words, he attempts to destroy the "disease" of lust which festers within himself.

Julia's words are even more applicable to Ferdinand: indeed, it is when he is in a state of psychological disintegration that Ferdinand reveals his desire for the Duchess's death. To his brother he discloses:

> I could kill her now,
> In you, or in my selfe, for I do thinke
> It is some sinne in us, God doth revenge
> By her.
>
> (II.v. 62-6)

This, Ferdinand's projection of his desire for vengeance onto God, is a more terrible abnegation of agency than Julia's blaming of her "love" for Bosola on a love potion. He refuses to accept that his desire, albeit sinful, is authentically his. Moreover, in suggesting that God's creation of Eve is an act of retribution, thus no different in kind to Zeus's creation of Pandora, he relegates woman to nothing more than a vehicle for divine vengeance. Hence, Ferdinand denies not only free will, but also the notion of

Christian *caritas*.

As I show earlier, Ferdinand, in his obsession with his sister's sexuality, correlates the "Tongue" with "a smoothe tale" and the "Lamprey" (*DM* I.i.321-4). In this, however, he unconsciously betrays the masculine as the repressed feminine and other: in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* references to feminine guile in relation to discourse have a clear correlation with sexual promiscuity. Indeed, the image of the trapped silkworm with which I began this chapter is apposite to Flamineo precisely because the tangled thread is representative of his promiscuous discourse; the added irony in this is that the malcontent's work as the "worm" who "spins" the misogynist discourse affiliates him with the feminine. This is made clear in I.ii. of *The White Devil*; dominated by Flamineo's loquaciousness, this scene climaxes with a soliloquy in which he presents "policy" as female and describes her in images which are usually misogynist in their application. Defined by her meanderings and non-linear impulsions, "policy" is as serpentine as silk thread and as guileful as Julia's tongue:

> Wee are ingag'd to mischiefe and must on.
> As Rivers to finde out the Ocean
> Flow with crooke bendings beneath forced bankes,
> Or as wee see, to aspire some mountaines top,
> The way ascends not straight, but Imitates
> The suttle fouldings of a Winters snake,
> So who knowes policy and her true aspect,
> Shall finde her waies winding and indirect.
>
> (*WD* I.i. 331-8)

In thus equating strategy with guile, Flamineo turns the misogynist discourse against himself: by self-definition he is feminine and other.

But there is a moment in *The White Devil* where the multiple images of winding or spinning and the phallic are inextricably woven together in a fusion of gender and subjectivity. Poised between two deaths, one mock and one real, Flamineo addresses dying men, and overturns the phallic as exclusively masculine:

> O Men
> That lye upon your death-beds, and are haunted
> With howling wives, neere trust them, they'le re-marry
> Ere the worm peirce your winding sheete: ere the Spider
> Make a thinne curtaine for your Epitaphes.
>
> (V.vi. 151-5)

With women's lust and perfidy here measured in terms of creatures' effacing of subjectivity, Flamineo, at a superficial level, reinforces misogyny and the woman/other symbiosis. But when the "worm [which] peirce[s]" is given a phallic connotation, differentiations between female/other and male become indistinguishable. Just as the male corpse is invaded by nature/woman/other, so the shroud, wound by women, and hence feminine, is invaded by the phallic/male. Where this non-differentiation or ambiguity of gender is a symbolic recapitulation of the roles of Vittoria and Isabella, and a prefiguration of those of the Duchess and Antonio, they reveal the instability of male subjectivity in the Renaissance courts of Rome and Malfi. Thus, where men repress "the

*anima mundi* ... the community of being, mystery and ambiguity ... imagination, emotion, instinct, body, [and] nature" the alienation and hatred they feel for woman is from, and for, themselves. And just as they apply to the malcontent and women, Flamineo's images of the worm bound in silk and the corpse in the winding sheet apply to the Renaissance subject: the death of the other is his self-annihilation.

# CHAPTER 3

For now we see through a glass, darkly[1]

Holbein's painting, *The Ambassadors,* is remarkable for the way in which it both represents and challenges ocularcentrism, the linear vision of Alberti's egocentric subject and the Renaissance shift in consciousness. Whereas, in a sense, all painting celebrates the dominance of the image in what Martin Jay terms "the apotheosis of the visual, the triumph of the simulacrum over what it purports to represent, a veritable surrender to the phantasmagoric spectacle rather than its sub-version",[2] *The Ambassadors* can also be seen as critiquing such an "apotheosis". Although Jay's remarks refer to a perspective on post- modernism, when applied to the English Renaissance they are equally appropriate: through ritual, the masque, pageantry and ceremonial displays of institutional power, this is a period which exulted in the "apotheosis of the visual ... the triumph of the simulacrum".[3] Thus where Holbein's painting interrogates the privileging of the visual and the ascendency of subjective, linear vision, it forges a link with the Platonic strand of theologico-philosophical thought. In this, Holbein prefigures Webster; both painting and tragedies chronicle the surrender of ontological authenticity to representation, and the concomitant eclipse of objective truth.

Where Augustine's denigration of sense knowledge is encapsulated in

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1 1 Corinthians, 13. 12.

2 Jay, p. 543.

3 Ibid.

his *Confessions,* he writes of what he terms *ocularum concupiscentia,* or ocular desire:

> in addition to our bodily appetites, which make us long to gratify all our senses and our pleasures and lead us to ruin ... the mind is also subject to a certain propensity to use the sense of the body, not for self-indulgence of a phsyical kind, but for the satisfaction of its own inquisitiveness. 4

And of the eyes themselves, Augustine states:

> [they] delight in beautiful shapes of different sorts and bright and attractive colours. I would not have these things take possession of my soul. Let God possess it, he who made them all.5

Where Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, has "beautiful shapes ... and bright attractive colours" which [tempt] the eye,6 the viewer's gaze is, however, seduced into privileging one subject over the other. As the epitome of Castiglione's courtier who "attracts the eyes of the onlookers ... as surely as the lodestone attracts iron", 7 it is Jean de Dinteville who is visually dominant. And where the focal point is filled with the instruments of empirical science and exploration, they are emblematic of new ways of seeing. As Greenblatt states: "the objects on the table virtually constitute a series of textbook illustrations for a manual on the art of perspective".8

4 Augustine, X. 35. p.241.

5 Ibid., X. 34. p. 238.

6 It is interesting to note that *The Ambassadors* was recently restored. Undoubtedly its visual impact is even greater than before.

7 Castiglione, p. 116.

8 Greenblatt, 1980, p. 17.

But when seen from the Neoplatonic-Augustinian perspective, these instruments are also emblematic of the desire for knowledge for its own sake.[9]

Given that drama is as much – if not *more* – visual as it is aural, Webster's interrogation of subjective vision, like Holbein's, is reflexive; but additionally, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* abound in verbal references. If characters comment on the state of their and others' eyes and the direction of their gazes, they also refer to ocular instruments which enhance or distort vision. Antonio believes that princes should "fore-see" (I.i. 22), and Isabella wishes that Brachiano would "turne [his] eyes / Upon [his] wretched wife and hopefull sonne", praying "that in time [he'll] fix them upon heaven" (*WD* II.i. 211-13). Ferdinand's eyes "dazell" (IV.ii.251); and Vittoria "threw[s] her eyes" (*WD* I.i.12) at Brachiano, but the Duchess "looke[s] quite thorough" Malateste (III.i.43). Ferdinand, however, requires Galileo's "fantastique glasse ... to view an other spacious world i'th 'Moone / And looke to finde a constant woman there" (II.iv 16-19), whereas Flamineo has seen "spectacles fashiond with ... perspective art " which multiply images of an inconstant woman (*WD* I.i. 94-8). And where the madman's "perspective" would draw "Doomes-day ... neerer" (IV.ii. 73-4), Bosola's "showes [him] hell" ( *DM* IV.ii. 345-6). [10] At one level a number of these references augment the misogynous discourse, but *in toto* they function, more importantly, as leitmotifs for the themes of false

9 Augustine, X, 35.

10 Sturgess suggests that by " 'perspective' ... the audience might understand a telescope, a topographer's tool for drawing townscapes accurately or a kind of image-distorting device, and it also referred to a picture so drawn that what appears distorted or jumbled from the normal viewing angle is correct from some other angle", p.97. Bosola, however, refers to his guilty conscience, a point that Ewbank makes. See Inga-Stina Ewbank, "Webster's Realism, or, 'A Cunning Piece Wrought Perspective', " *John Webster*, ed. Brian Morris (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1970) p.164. Hereafter cited as Ewbank.

appearances and the instability of sense perception.

But such references also draw attention to the characters' different perspectives. As Sturgess points out, albeit in reference to *The Duchess of Malfi*, "Perspective in its modern sense was a Renaissance invention and Webster's whole dramaturgy is one of perspectives".[11] And indeed, Webster suggests that it is perspective, or subjective vision, which establishes what is seen, how it is seen, and indeed whether something is seen at all. Hence the interrogation of the epistemological limits to subjective vision is an intrinsic element in the tragedies: the audience see some events brought into the foreground, others placed in the background; they see the juxtaposition of conflicting ideologies and observe characters who "oversee" or overlook others; and they are submitted to *trompe l'oeil*, where what seems simulated is real, and what appears real is false. That the audience's capacity to make moral judgements is thus destabilized prompts Inga-Stina Ewbank to suggest that since "[Webster's] art seems to build on a continual shifting of perspective ... both the moral attitude and the artistic unity of his plays [are] difficult to define".[12] But it is this "shifting of perspective" which, in fact, defines the "moral attitude", and unity, of Webster's tragedies. If Webster deconstructs perceptions and disallows a stable basis for interpretation or ethical judgements based on the visual, he engages the audience in a dialectic whereby they are challenged to see "Platonically"; that is not with, but through the eyes, or with the mind. Webster suggests that what should be "seen" are the epistemological limits to sensory perception, bringing a recognition that

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11 Sturgess, p.97

12 Ewbank, p.159.

"man" is not the centre of the universe. Francis Bacon, likewise, rejects subjective vision, and warns of the limits of knowledge and the dangers of pride:

> it is a false assertion that the sense of man is the measure of things. On the contrary, all perceptions, as well of the sense as of the mind, are according to the measure of the individual and not according to the measure of the universe. And the human understanding is like a false mirror, which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolors the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.[13]

Whereas verbal references to vision illustrate the egocentric perspective of the hegemonic males in the Renaissance Italian court, the "continual shifting of perspectives" to which Ewbank alludes is a structural component of *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.* Significantly, where both tragedies open with dialogues in which opposing ideological viewpoints are presented – on the one hand the moral absolutism of Christian doctrine, on the other the relativism of a universe dominated by subjective vision – the dialectic of Webster's tragedies is established from the outset. *The White Devil* opens with Lodovico's indignant "Banisht?" (*WD* I.i.1), followed by his apostrophizing of Democritus (2-3) and his references to Fortune (4); thus the play immediately presents the materialist and utilitarian perspective of the Machiavellian subject. Whereas his belief in a deterministic universe is used to justify his refusal to take moral responsibility for his actions,

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13 Francis Bacon, "The Great Instauration", *The Philosophy of the 16th and 17th Centuries.* ed. Richard H.Popkin (New York: The Free Press, 1966) p.92.

Lodovico denies Christian notions both of free will and objective morality.[14] This ethically relativist position is also revealed in his anger at a punishment he considers unduly harsh and compounded when he calls his crimes "flea-bytinges" (32) and no worse than Brachiano's "close pandarisme [which] seekes to prostitute / The honour of *Vittoria Corombona*" (41-2). If Vittoria with "one kisse to [Brachiano]" could secure his pardon, and condemned men can secure their freedom with "pleasant lookes, and money" (54), Lodovico suggests that a corrupt and hypocritical social order is justification for his absence of morality.

Counterbalancing Lodovico's subjective viewpoint, however, is the Christian stoicism implicit in the comments of Gasparo and Antonelli: if, from their perspective the crimes for which Lodovico has been exiled are the ruin of "the noblest Earldome" (15) and "faire Lordships" (28), plus "certaine Murders ... / Bloody and full of horror" (31-32), they remind the audience of an objective moral order founded on Christian principles. This is especially so when Gasparo speaks of mediation and expiation: if "The law doth somtimes mediate, thinkes it good / Not ever to steepe violent sinnes in blood" (34-5), then Lodovico's "gentle pennance [should] both end [his] crimes, / And in the example better these bad times" (36-7). In instructing Lodovico, on the other hand, Antonelli reinforces not only Christian stoicism, but an Augustinian existentialism which emphasizes plenitude of being as personal responsibility:

> Have a full man within you;

14 Ironically, Lodovico seems unaware of Democritus's belief that sense experience leads to "bastard knowledge". It is also interesting to note that Democritus blinded himself so that he could transcend corporeal, hence, deceptive, vision in order to see the truth with "inner" vision. See Coplestone, pp.124-6.

> Wee see that Trees beare no such pleasant fruite
> There where they grew first, as where they are new set.
> Perfumes the more they are chaf'd the more they render
> Their pleasing sents, and so affliction
> Expresseth vertue, fully, whether trew,
> Or ells adulterate.
>
> (44-50)

By contrast, *The Duchess of Malfi* opens not with the protestations of an outraged moral relativist, but the righteous pronouncements of a moral absolutist. Moreover, unlike Lodovico, Antonio is a man who is "full" and whom the Duchess is to later describe as so "compleat" that he can inwardly "turne [his] eyes / And progresse through [him]selfe (*DM* I.i. 421-3). Thus it is Antonio who presents an idealized view of the Erasmian Christian state which is in marked contrast to the world of Machiavellian utilitarianism that Lodovico inhabits:

> In seeking to reduce both State, and People
> To a fix'd Order, there juditious King
> Begins at home: Quits first his Royall Pallace
> Of flattring Sicophants, of dissolute,
> And infamous persons, which he sweetely termes
> His Masters Master-peece (the worke of Heaven)
> Considring duely, that a Princes Court
> Is like a common Fountaine, whence should flow
> Pure silver-droppes in generall: But if't chance
> Some curs'd example poyson't neere the head,
> "Death, and diseases through the whole land spread.
> And what is't makes this blessed government,

> But a most provident Councell, who dares freely
> Informe him, the corruption of the times?
> Though some oth'Court hold it presumption
> To instruct Princes what they ought to doe,
> It is a noble duety to informe them
> What they ought to fore-see.
>
> (I.i.5-22)

But just as Lodovico's utilitarianism is counterbalanced by the views of his antagonists, so Antonio's hyperbolic advocacy of government "blessed" by the instructions of "provident" men and endowed with divine sanction is cut short by Bosola's entrance (I.i.22). Antonio immediately shifts from abstract idealism to the direct criticism of a specific man who "Would be as leacherous, covetous, or proud, / Bloody, or envious, as any man, / If he has meanes to be so" (26-8). This juxtaposition of the Christian and Machiavellian perspectives parallels the opening of *The White Devil,* but its dialectic is more complex and sustained. When the Cardinal enters (28) and Bosola complains bitterly to him about not receiving due payment for services rendered (29-43), this has the effect of verifying Antonio's opinion of the latter – an effect enhanced by Bosola continuing to rail beyond the Cardinal's exit and until his own. (43-64). Having set this tone of conflict, Webster then presents the audience with an exchange between Ferdinand and Castruchio (85-130) which functions at a number of levels. Where it exposes the militarized nature of subjectivity – as Castruchio puts it "that Realme is never long in quiet, where the Ruler is a Souldier" (98-9) – this exchange also introduces the misogyny which dominates the play. Furthermore, if Ferdinand "give[s] fire" (118) – with

all that that implies in the context of the play as a whole – his obsessive, desire – driven psyche and his sublimated lust for the Duchess are also established. Significantly, this is in direct relation to both Antonio's derogatory comments regarding Ferdinand to Delio (146-74), and his idealization of the Duchess (175-97).

Where Ferdinand sees the Duchess from a perspective tainted by desire, Antonio, initially, sees with a detached idealism informed by an equally abstract Christianity: projecting his psyche onto her, Ferdinand sees a "lusty Widowe" (325) of "high blood" (284); at a distance, Antonio sees a woman of such exemplary virtue (175-191) that she should be a mirror for other women: they should "breake their flattring Glasses, / And dresse themselves in her" (192-3). But as I show in chapter 2, Antonio's remarks, juxtaposed as they are with the Duchess's almost immediate entry on stage, become ironic in the extreme; this is especially so, given his submissive role when she later woos him (389-459). We then learn that, neither "whore" nor abstinent widow, the Duchess sees herself as "not the figure cut in Allablaster / Kneeles at [her] husbands tombe" (440-1), but a "flesh, and blood" (439) woman.

Insofar as she fulfils the Erasmian exhortation to "instruct [others] how they should conduct themselves towards their husbands", Cornelia, in *The White Devil,* is the desexualized and idealized Renaissance widow. As such, she functions as the voice of traditional Christian morality, reminding Brachiano of his civic responsibility:

> The lives of Princes should like dyals move,
> Whose regular example is so strong,
> They make the times by them go right or wrong.

(*WD* I.ii.271-3)

Spoken in response to witnessing Brachiano's wooing of her daughter, these lines do not, however, represent the whole of her viewpoint. In construing lust in terms which anticipate Monticelso's (II.i.36-43), she, by association, differentiates subjectivity from the other:

> now I find our house
> Sinking to ruine. Earth-quakes leave behind,
> Where they have tyrannised, iron, or lead, or stone;
> But (woe to ruine) violent lust leaves none.
>
> (201-4)

Yet Cornelia also speaks from a matriarchal pre-rational perspective which confirms her as the patriarchally constructed demonic other. Conflating images of nature and witchcraft she rails:

> O that this faire garden,
> Had all with poysoned hearbes of *Thessaly*
> At first bene planted, made a nursery
> For witch-craft rather then a buriall plot
> For both your Honours.
>
> (256-60)

And in cursing Vittoria (277-84), she speaks with both matriarchal and patriarchal voices. It is her daughter upon whom she confers the status of other.

What is remarkable about this scene, however, is not that Cornelia

intervenes in the wooing, but that she is present at all. Furthermore, where normally a seduction would be prolonged and witnessed only by the off-stage audience, here, it is overlooked not only by Cornelia, but also by Zanche and Flamineo. Thus, if Cornelia's condemnation presents one perspective, albeit expressed with multiple voices, Flamineo and Zanche present others. And whereas the latter's is not a voice at all, but the semiotic presence of a silent black woman juxtaposed with a "white devil", Flamineo's is that of the Machiavellian utilitarian. As the dialogue between Brachiano and Vittoria increases in its intimacy, and he sees not ruin, but the promise of social and economic advancement, Flamineo's response shifts from approval to a voyeuristic excitement. Amplifying Brachiano's sexual innuendo, Flamineo comments: "Excellent, / His Jewell for her Jewell, well put in Duke. ... / That's better, she must weare his Jewell lower" (208-212).

In the wooing scene, Flamineo functions as part of a complex interplay of conflicting viewpoints; elsewhere his protean role as pander-actor-playwright demands a proactive manipulation of perspectives. Like Hamlet, he believes that "The purpose of playing ... is as 'twere to hold the mirror up to Nature to show virtue her own feature, [and] scorn her own image".[15] For, as Michael Hattaway observes, while "[s]ome acting *is* based on mimicry or 'mirroring' ... the lines could be used to describe either the plain glass of theatrical 'realism' or the distorted glass of a satire".[16] Indeed, where Webster's tragedies are self-referential and both Flamineo and Bosola self-consciously adopt on-stage roles, they hold up both kinds

15 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* ed. G.R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) III.i. 20-4.

16 See A.R. Braunmuller, and Michael Hattaway, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 91.

of mirrors – those which distort and those which give a "true" reflection. Flamineo and Bosola, therefore, have a dramatic function beyond the manipulation of what Callaghan calls "the distracted desires of others in the sphere of sexuality": [17] they both hold up the "cloudy" mirror of Bacon's analogy and "[distort] the nature of things by mingling [their] own nature with it". Where they wilfully exploit subjective vision, presenting their own distorted perspectives to serve their own ends – the most obvious example of this being their misogynous discourse – they also, paradoxically, reflect what Webster posits as the horrifying consequences of a world dominated by subjective vision and ethical relativism.

Flamineo's function as the holder of twin mirrors can be seen in the build-up to Camillo's entry on stage in I.ii. Here, Flamineo preconditions the audience to believe that Camillo is a passionless, syphilitic, cowardly, and impotent wittol (26-32); this is compounded by Flamineo's aside when Camillo finally appears (44-7), and the triangular exchange which occurs when Vittoria joins them (106-180). The audience soon learns that Flamineo's reflected image of Camillo is a true one. But, in a sense, the mirror Flamineo holds up also distorts. By reflecting back to the audience an image of Camillo based on appearances and not morality, Flamino deflects their inner vision away from seeing ethically, and their sympathy is manipulated in Vittoria's favour; from a moral absolutist perspective, it should lie with the about-to-be-cuckolded husband. Furthermore, to reinforce ethical relativism Flamineo actually uses verbal references to subjective vision. It is not in the spirit of pyrrhonic scepticism that Flamineo tells Camillo:

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17 Callaghan, p. 125.

> Thou shalt lye in a bed stuft with turtles feathers, swoone in perfumed lynnen like the fellow was smothered in roses; so perfect shall be thy happinesse, that as men at Sea thinke land and trees and shippes go that way they go, so both heaven and earth shall seeme to go your voyage.
>
> (I.ii. 140-4)

Manipulated by the promise of legitimate sexual fulfilment, Camillo cannot see that Flamineo's real purpose is to facilitate an illegitimate sexual union. Similarly, Camillo is taunted with the "error" of his jealousy when Flamineo speaks of spectacles which produce multiple images :

> I have seene a paire of spectacles fashiond with such perspective art, that lay downe but one twelve pence ath'bord, twill appeare as if there were twenty; now should you weare a paire of these spectacles, and see your wife tying her shooe, you would Imagine twenty hands were taking up of your wives clothes, and this would put you into a horrible causlesse fury.
>
> (*WD* I.ii. 93-99)

When Camillo then insists that the multiple images produced by glasses are not "the fault ... in the eye-sight" (100), he speaks the truth. This Flamineo acknowledges (101), but then goes on to say "but they that have the yellow Jaundeise thinke all objects they looke on to bee yellow" (101-2). By encouraging Camillo to "broaden", yet recognize the limits of, subjective vision, Flamineo achieves the reverse: Camillo does not see the broader picture which shows that he is being manipulated to Flamineo's own ends.

Bosola, like Flamineo, knows he inhabits an ethically relativist world; as he notes, Ferdinand's "Divels" are what "Hell calls Angels" (*DM* I.i. 250-

1). Thus, like Flamineo, he holds up mirrors which are clouded by his desire for power. When he spies on the Duchess, for example, he holds up a mirror clouded not by his jaundiced vision, but by Ferdinand's obsessional lust and misogyny. This is especially so when Bosola looks for evidence of the Duchess's pregnancy; her clothes are "bawd-farthingalls (II.i. 143) because she is "too much swell'd" (II.i.151) by a "strange instrument" (II.ii. 8-9). While this objectification of the Duchess is a reflection of Ferdinand's vision, it is a "true" picture of her condition but given its subjectivity, it is false. Paradoxically, however, when Bosola offers the audience an image of the world through his eyes, he shows that he is a disillusioned idealist. Thus his verbal assault on the mid-wife's so-called "face-physicke" expands into a metaphysical discourse on the nature of being which is clearly a condemnation of self-fashioned subjectivity (II.i.1-55). Similarly, when in III.ii. he focusses his attention on the officers who have been abusing Antonio for his alleged dishonesty, Bosola mirrors life at court as corrupt, albeit filtered through the cloudy lens of his cynicism:

> these are Rogues: that in's prosperitie,
> But to have waited on his fortune, could have wish'd
> His durty Stirrop rivited through their noses,
> And follow'd after's Mule, like a Beare in a Ring:
> Would have prostituted their daughters, to his Lust:
> Made their first-borne Intelligencers: thought none happy
> But such as were borne under his bless'd Plannet:
> And wore his Livery: and doe these Lyce drop off now?
> Well, never looke to have the like againe;
> He hath left a sort of flattring rogues behind him,
> Their doome must follow: Princes pay flatterers,

> In their owne money: Flatterers dissemble their vices,
> And they dissemble their lies, that's Justice.
>
> (227-39)

Here subjectivity and objectivity cohere; inasmuch as Bosola is right in general terms, he is also speaking from his subjective viewpoint as Ferdinand's spy; he therefore has a vested interest is winning the Duchess's confidence. Like Flamineo, Bosola holds a mirror up to the truth, but in that his motives are self-serving, he is also subjective: objective truth is coloured with subjectivity.

The use of the malcontent's discourse is only one of Webster's strategies in destabilizing subjective vision and sense knowledge. By staging plays within plays, Webster's use of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor amplifies both tragedies' ontological concerns. But it also destabilizes subjective seeing and sense knowledge. An example of this is, clearly, Isabella's performance, in *The White Devil*, as the retributive wife. While this is important in drawing attention to the male/female and inauthentic/authentic polarities, it also functions as a critique of subjective ways of seeing. Hence the audience's prior knowledge that Isabella dissimulates is essential in highlighting the on-stage audience's subjective responses. Where Isabella confirms gender expectations and is seen as "a foolish, mad, / And jealous woman" (II.i. 263-4), it is because moral judgements are made on the basis of public display and ritual. Furthermore, Brachiano's cursing of the "Priest / That sang the wedding Masse, and even [his] Issue" (II.i. 189-90) has the effect both of increasing audience sympathy for Isabella and their condemnation of Brachiano. The on-stage audience, by contrast, lacks full knowledge of events; neither are

they preconditioned in their sympathy for Isabella. If there is a disjunction between the perception of the audience and the on-stage observers it is one based on knowledge and viewpoint. For the on-stage observers, the visual impact of Isabella's kissing of Brachiano's hand and the removal of her weddingring is a ritualistic verification that it is she who instigates the divorce. Following her vitriolic outburst, it is also the *visual* climax to her performance.

The disjunction between on-stage and off-stage audience knowledge is also exploited in *The Duchess of Malfi*. When the audience witnesses the Duchess's marriage, they see from the perspective of a woman circumscribed by gender ideology; characters on stage (and off-stage, "absent" characters) do not enjoy that privilege. Hence their view of the Duchess derives from the absence of visually authenticated knowledge; consequently she is seen as sexually lax. Where this is shown by the bawdy remarks made by the servants when the Duchess is about to give birth (II.ii. 33-45), it is also a reported viewpoint, revealed in a conversation between Antonio and Delio:

> *Delio.* What say the common people?
> *Antonio.* The common-rable, do directly say
> She is a Strumpet.
> *Delio.* And your graver heades,
> (Which would be pollitique) what censure they?
> *Antonio.* They do observe, I grow to infinite purchase
> The leaft-hand way, and all suppose the Duchesse
> Would amend it, if she could: For, say they,
> Great Princes, though they grudge their Officers
> Should have such large, and unconfined meanes

> To get wealth under them, will not complaine
> Least thereby they should make them odious
> Unto the people.
>
> (III.i. 24-35)

As Antonio observes, it is because of lack of knowledge that the people condemn him and the Duchess: "Of love, or marriage, betweene her and me, / They never dreame of " (36-7).

No one but Cariola has witnessed, and therefore knows of, the Duchess's and Antonio's marriage; in this Webster not only critiques value judgements made without objective knowledge, but also interrogates the function of public ritual in relation to morality judged and codified by the visual. In a world in which being and morality are based on superficial display, neither the public at large nor "Great princes" can conceive of a private morality which bypasses the Church as intermediary. Indeed, Bosola draws attention to this when he tells the Duchess that, of her " private nuptiall bed", she has made "The humble, and faire Seminary of peace" (III.ii. 281-2). Thus, when the Cardinal tears the wedding ring from the Duchess's finger, Webster presents a situation which is a parallel to Isabella's "divorce" in *The White Devil.* But here, performed in conjunction with the Duchess's banishment, the ritualized nature of the ring's removal is visually enhanced by the opulent setting of Shrine of our Lady of Loretto: the First Pilgrim noting that he "[has] not seene a goodlier Shrine then this, / Yet [he has] visited many" (III.iv 1-2). But even more important is the ritual's juxtaposition with the Cardinal's ceremonial enstalment as a soldier. Thus Webster magnifies the hypocritical nature of both. Where the audience sees an ecclesiastic removing his ring – one

placed on his finger in an earlier religious ceremony – juxtaposed against his removal of the Duchess's ring, they must question the validity of ritual, [18] which here becomes a visual display emptied of meaning. That ritual is no guide to objective truth is, moreover, verified by the exchange between the pilgrims; their dialogue shows that institutional power, bolstered by ceremony and ritual, is a façade behind which chafes the desire for personal and private vendetta :

*1 Pilgrim*: Here's a strange turne of state: who would have thought
So great a Lady, would have match'd her selfe
Unto so meane a person? Yet the Cardinall
Beares himselfe much too cruell.
*2 Pilgrim*: They are bansh'd.
*IPilgrim*: But I would aske what power hath this state
Of *Ancona*, to determine of a free Prince?
*2 Pilgrim*: They are a free state sir, and her brother shew'd
How that the Pope fore-hearing of her loosenesse,
Hath seaz'd into th'protection of the Church
The Dukedome, which she held as dowager.
*1 Pilgrim*: But by what of justice?
*2 Pilgrim*: Sure I thinke but none,
Only her brothers instigation.
*1 Pilgrim*: What was it, with such violence he tooke
Of from her finger?
*2 Pilgrim*: 'Twas her wedding ring,
Which he vow'd shortly he would sacrifice
To his revenge.

18 See James Knowles, "The Spectacle of the Realm: civic consciousness, rhetoric and ritual in early modern London", eds. J.R Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, *Theatre and Government Under the Early Stewarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.157-189.

(III.iv.23-38)

Whereas in the two tragedies, Webster's critique of moral relativism is revealed through a dialectical tension between opposing viewpoints and modes of consciousness, juxtaposed voices, plays within plays, and ritual performances, it is the dumb shows which provide the most complex and compelling interrogation of ocularcentrism and sense knowledge. An example of this in *The Duchess of Malfi* is the Duchess's subjection to the display of "*the artificiall figures of* Antonio *and his children; appearing as if they were dead*" (IV.i.54.01-2). On the evidence of her eyes, these are the corpses of her husband and children. Thus the theatrical presentation of wax figures as once-living beings is a disturbing reminder of the deceptive nature of sense knowledge: since things "artificiall" cannot be "dead" the Duchess suffers a double deception. In fact, the effigies are authentic in terms of their own mode of reality: they are inert, not because they are "dead", but because life has never existed. But it is also the Duchess's vision, not jaundiced like Flamineo's, but imbued with love, which makes her vulnerable to such a deception. This makes Ferdinand's deception terrible indeed, and it is in response to this "sad spectacle" (56) that the Duchess sees herself as "fashion'd out of wax, / Stucke with a magicall needle and then buried / In some fowle dung-hill" (62-4). Believing herself deprived of those whom she loves, she is thus drained of authentic being and "fashion'd" as a simulacrum. Moreover, given that "dung" is reminiscent of Bosola's earlier metaphor for his entrapment as Ferdinand's spy (I.i.274), that it was used for ripening the apricots that induced the Duchess's labour (II.i.134), and that the "needle" is yet

another name for the phallic poniard, the Duchess represents herself as if through the eyes of Ferdinand.

In *The White Devil* it is not the static display of "corpses" but the actual murders of Isabella and Camillo which are performed as dumb shows. And since Brachiano and the Conjuror are present on stage as observers, the audience witnesses more than a staged spectacle. They also see the man responsible for the murders of unwanted spouses indulging a desire to observe suffering for its own sake. This is made clear by the allusions to consumption and the satisfaction of sensory desire that Webster places in the conjuror's mouth. Couching Isabella's devotion in terms reminiscent of Castiglione's imagery, the conjuror tells Brachiano that Isabella would nightly "feed her eyes and lippes" (II.ii.27) on Brachiano's portrait. Where this remark is a reminder of the sensual pleasure provoked at court by opulent dress and public ritual, its purpose here is to highlight, not Isabella's, but Brachiano's ocular desire, which is at this moment requited in a form more degraded than Isabella's satisfaction in gazing upon her husband's portrait. Thus Webster's manipulation of audience sympathy for Isabella and condemnation of Brachiano is taken to the uttermost. Isabella, dressed for bed – hence outside the sphere in which the gaze is solicited – is shown at a private moment. When the audience observe her triple reverences before the portrait, followed by three kisses (23.09-10), as if to an icon, they cannot doubt that her devotion is real. Furthermore, they see the " *sorrow exprest in* Giovanni *and in Count* Lodovico" (23.11); thus Brachiano's "Excellent, then shee's dead" (II.ii.4) must be seen as callous in the extreme.

Likewise, the audience witness Camillo's murder at a moment when

he is physically vulnerable, killed during the "play" of recreation, amidst drinking and dancing, and stripped of his outer garments (37.04). Here the semiotic power of dress is also exploited. In the play's second scene, Flamineo had suggested that in "white sattin one would take [Camillo] by his blacke mussel to be no other creature then a maggot" (I.ii.127-9). Thus it can be inferred that, like his assassins, "*strip[ped] ... into their shirts*" (II.ii.37.04) Camillo appears less identifiably foolish, and more "human" than before. Consequently, when he is pitched over the vaulting horse, and has his neck wrung by Flamineo "*with the help of the rest* " (37.06) the audience's sympathy for him as victim of what amounts to a gang execution, is total. Counterbalancing, if not obliterating, the earlier images of the foolish Camillo as a man who deserves to be cuckolded, this dumb show, like the first, highlights Brachiano's guilt. His remark, "'Twas quaintly done" (38), is made by a man for whom, if it serves his egocentric desire, murder is justified.

As the stage directions tell us, the first dumb show opens with Dr. Julio and Christophero "*put[ting] on spectacles of glasse, which cover their eyes and noses*" (II.ii.23.02-3). Because references to ocular aids are, here, concretized – and *seen* – their metaphoric function becomes even more powerful. They remind the audience that where the eyes are vulnerable, vision is manipulable: the glasses which protect the murderers' eyes from poison may also modify what they see. But they also draw attention to subjective seeing as a metaphor for ethical relativism; that Dr. Julio and Christophero depart "*laughing*" (23.05) intensifies the horror of their repellent crime, but it also emphasizes that the assassins do not "see" the true consequences of their actions. Their spectacles are thus a metaphor

for their moral blindness.

What the audience also see is Brachiano and the Conjuror observing Isabella and Isabella, in turn, meeting the simulated gaze of Brachiano. Webster thus produces a complex interplay of vision whose effect is of profound ontological importance: what the conjuror terms a "dead shadow" gazes back at the flesh and blood man, and Brachiano sees before him what, for Isabella, he has become – absence replaced by his representation. Furthermore, in the absence of an authentic identity grounded in objective Christian morality, the "real" man is as inauthentic as his effigy. For the audience to observe the flesh and blood character situated before his own representation as an aesthetic object is as destabilizing as if they were to stand in the National gallery and observe George de Selve and Jean de Dinteville materialize before, and meet the gaze of Holbein's representations.

In the context of *The White Devil*'s critique of the ocularcentric world of the Roman court, Brachiano is his own effigy. Since the portrait is effectively his "mirror" image, his gaze is also Narcissus-like: Brachiano sees what Ovid terms "a phantom of a mirrored shape; / Nothing itself ".[19] Therefore, Lodovico's statement that he might have poisoned Brachiano's "looking- glasse", his "praier booke, or a paire of beades, / The pummell of

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19 In Ovid's version of the myth, the "spellbound" Narcissus "staring endlessly,/His eyes his own undoing" (441-2) is challenged with the ontological implications of a subjectivity constructed on the self-as-object split from subject:

> You simple boy , why strive in vain to catch
> A fleeting image? What you see is nowhere;
> And what you love-but turn away-you lose!
> You see a phantom of a mirrored shape:
> Nothing itself.
> (433-437)

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) p.64.

his saddle ... / Or th' handle of his racket" (V.i.66-68), recalls the importance of the self-constituting gaze in constructing the Renaissance prince's subjectivity. But where in Webster subjective vision is correlative with narcissistic love and egocentric desire, it is also correlative with the Platonic concept of corrupt Eros. Rather than the union of the soul with the good and the beautiful – in Christian terms the union with God – he desires the possession of another as a projection of his egocentricity. In other words his desire is carnal. Thus Brachiano does not "fix [his eyes] upon heaven" (*WD* II.i. 213), but upon himself; he only sees his egocentric desire and this, in turn, is fixed on Vittoria-as-object. Where in *The Courtier,* Pietro Bembo defines Platonic Eros, he also notes that

> anyone who thinks to enjoy ... beauty by possessing the body is deceiving himself and is moved not by true knowledge ... but by a false opinion derived from the desire of the senses. So the pleasure that follows is also necessarily false and deceptive. Consequently, all those lovers who satisfy their impure desires with the women they love meet with one or two evils: either as soon as they achieve the end the desire they experience satiety and distaste and even begin to hate what they love ... or else they are still troubled by the same avidity and desire, since they have not in fact attained the end they were seeking. 20

Thus, where Brachiano initially seeks plenitude through Vittoria, his Petrarchan "loss" is soon experienced as real. When at first sight of Vittoria he is "Quite lost" (I.ii 3), without her, he will be "lost eternallie"

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20 Castiglione, p.326.

(191). [21] In his desire to fill the spiritual vacuum left by solipsism, Brachiano also tells Vittoria that "she shall to [him] at once / Be Dukedome, health, wife, children, friends and all" (249-50). Such Petrarchan hyperbole, counterpointing what is Brachiano's later wish to atomize Vittoria, validates Bembo's remark that satiated desire turns to hate.

That Brachiano's desire for Vittoria is a degraded form of Eros is highlighted by her first appearance on stage. Presenting a dramatic image which recalls Bembo's analogy of beauty, Vittoria is like a " lovely vase of polished gold set with precious stones [which] attracts to itself the gaze of others ... inflaming ... passion and desire." [22] But whereas the vase is infused with "divine goodness",[23] the source of Vittoria's glow is externally produced; despite the presence of numerous attendants carrying torches, she demands "More lights" (I.ii. 2). Thus, as an irradiated aesthetic object, Vittoria provokes Brachiano's carnal desire. The Duchess of Malfi, however, is, according to Ferdinand "too much i'th light" (IV.i.41). This confirms that Ferdinand's desire, like Brachiano's, is a corruption of love; this is made even clearer when Bosola reports to the Duchess that Ferdinand

made a solemne vowe

21 Ficino wrote: "The lover carves into his soul the model of the beloved ... the soul of the lover becomes the mirror into which the image of the loved one is reflected". Couliano makes the point that this " entails rather a complicated dialectic of love, in which the object is changed into the subject ousting the subject, who, tormented by the anxiety of prospective annihilation due to being deprived of his state as subject, desperately claims the right to a form of existence". See Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*. trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p.31.

22 Castiglione, p. 326.

23 Ibid., p.325-6.

> Never to see you more; he comes i'th' night:
> And prayes you (gently) neither Torch, nor Taper
> Shine in your Chamber: he will kiss your hand,
> And reconcile himselfe: but, for his vowe,
> He dares not see you.
>
> (IV.i.23-8)

Having wished to "Damne her, that body of hers" (IV.i.118), Ferdinand's desire is clearly stimulated by the visual; as Pescara notes "A very *Salamander* lives in's eye. / To mocke the eager violence of fire" (III.iii. 47- 8 ).[24] That his gaze is obsessional is evident when, in response to the Duchess's suggestion that Ferdinand "see" her husband, he expresses a desire to kill him: "Yes, if I could change / Eyes with a Basilisque" (III.ii. 87-8). Desire which is fuelled by the visual is thus linked with relativist ethics; there is not, as Monticelso sees it, a specific link between female adultery and murder, but between secularized or corrupt Eros and relativist ethics. Therefore, the state of Ferdinand's eyes also reflects his spiritual blindness: unable to weep at the sight of his sister's corpse, Ferdinand's eyes "dazell" (*DM* IV.ii. 251), and later, as evidence of his guilt, they are "cruell sore" (V.ii. 61). As the Cardinal notes, only a "change of object in [Ferdinand's] eye" can "distract him" (V.iv. 4-5).

Ferdinand does not attempt to alleviate ocular pain by the "change of object", however, but by its destruction. Yet, where woman is the embodiment of the other by which the subject differentiates himself, she is also the catalyst to his reunification with his authentic being. Thus, in Webster's tragedies, when solipsistic Renaissance subjectivity is

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24 See *Works*, p. 631.

deconstructed, authentic being is re-established and the self is reunified with the otherness of the "community of being, mystery, ambiguity ... imagination, emotion, instinct, body, [and] nature".[25] Where this is initiated through women, love and death, not-knowing is emptied of its threat and characters become "blind" to knowledge predicated on physical vision: they see spiritually.

Where eyes that have been "dazelled" by spiritual blindness are opened by insight, characters see a world which eludes rational delimitation. Then they become authentic compassionate beings with a capacity to love. As with Bosola, this is achieved by their exposure to a woman/death juxtaposition, but equally occurs through their exposure to madness – their own or others'. Where this collapse of rational, humanist subjectivity brings a reunification with the authentic, passionate self, it is also conjoined with the feminine. Evocative of Tarnas's view of the reunification of the subject as with the other, it is paralled by Erasmus's view of faith as, likewise, a disassociation from the rational. In *Praise of Folly,* Erasmus writes:

> it is quite clear that the Christian religion has a kind of kinship with folly in some form, though it has none at all with wisdom. If you want proofs of this, first consider the fact that the very young and the very old, women and simpletons, are the people who take the greatest delight in sacred and holy things; and are therefore always found nearest the altars, led there doubtless solely by their natural instinct.[26]

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25 Tarnas, p.442.

26 Erasmus, *Praise of Folly,* trans. Betty Radice, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971) p. 201. Hereafter cited as *Folly.* It is interesting to note that in 1515, Holbein drew thirty-seven illustrations for this work. See George Faludy, *Erasmus of Rotterdam,* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970), p.132. .

Here, with his much celebrated irony, the "folly" of which Erasmus speaks is both Pauline[27] and Platonic.[28] And if those who are excluded from humanist subjectivity have a closer affinity with the divine because of the "wisdom" of their "irrationality", conversely, rational self-fashioners are alienated from its mystery. Where women's grief or "madness" is shown to be directly responsible for a spiritual response in men, Webster complies with Erasmus's view that it is women, children and fools who are closest to the spiritual; as Erasmus also states: "the first great founders of the faith were great lovers of simplicity and bitter enemies of learning." [29] Consequently, it is only when men are mad, or old, that they are able see the "wisdom" of the self-asserting heroic subject as true madness. Thus Antonio, lacking the passion or desire which drives other characters to excess, experiences no shift in consciousness. In this Webster supports the viewpoint that the repentant sinner causes more delight in heaven than the piously complacent.

Consistent with this is the way in which Brachiano experiences a shift of consciousness initiated through his poison-induced madness. Significantly, the poison's attack is not on the limbs, or organs whose function is involuntary, but on his mind. His brain "on fire" (*WD* V.iii. 4), he transcends the rational, constructed edifice of subjectivity and sees with inner vision which deconstructs the discourses of power. As Lodovico reports to Francisco:

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27 As Paul puts it: "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" ( 1 Corinthians 1, 27).

28 For comment on Plato's "divine madness", see Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love: Plato to Luther* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p.61.

29 *Folly*, p. 201.

> Hee's fall'n into a strange distraction.
> Hee talkes of Battailes and Monopolies,
> Levying of taxes, and from that descends
> To the most braine-sicke language. His minde fastens
> On twentie severall objects, which confound
> Deepe Sence with follie.
>
> (V.iii. 69-74)

What Brachiano sees is not the multiplication of identical images such as Flamineo's falsifying glasses produce, but a proliferation of those which communicate truth. Thus he sees a world where both men and institutions are corrupt: the a Court is overrun with "foule vermin" (125), Francisco has "convayd coyne forth our territories; / Bought and sold offices; [and] oppres'd the poore" (V.iii. 82-3), and while Flamineo is seen "dancing on the ropes" carrying "A monie-bag in each hand, to keepe hime even, / For feare of breaking's necke"(110-112), a money-hungry lawyer "stares and gapes / When the mony will fall" (109-114). Reminiscent of both Isabella's and Vittoria's subversion of rhetoric, his comment, "th'argument / Is fearfull when Church-men stagger in't" (120-1), undermines ecclesiastical authority as sophistic. And although directed at Francisco, Brachiano's reference to "That old dog-fox, that Politician Florence!" (92), is unconsciously allusive to the Machiavellian representation of Renaissance subjectivity. But when it is out of "nothing" (105) that he sees "the Devill" (102) "In a blew bonnet, and a paire of breeches / With a great codpeece ... stucke full of pinnes / With pearles o'the head of them" (V.iii. 97-101), he sees lust turned against itself. If the image of a codpiece

pierced with phallic symbols is a subversive image of patriarchal power and prefigurative of the worm piercing the shroud, it also symbolizes self-annihilation. Brachiano recognizes that the desire for the good, subverted by concupiscence, has led him to mistake sexual desire and possession of beauty as ends in themselves. No longer seen through the prism of erotic desire, Vittoria is unrecognizable: he sees her only as an anonymous woman whose "haire is sprinkled with Arras powder, that makes her looke as if she had sinn'd in the Pastrie" (117-8).

Ironically, it is when feigning madness that Flamineo speaks of the corruption at the Roman court; "*distracted*" (III.iii.01) and abhorring his role as pandar to Brachiano, he tells Marcello and Lodovico:

> Ide rather go weede garlicke; travaile through France, and be mine owne ostler; weare sheep-skin lininges; or shoos that stinke of blacking; bee entred into the list of the fourtie thousand pedlars in Poland.
>
> (III.iii.3-6)

Thus Flamineo confirms that to be dislocated from the Court, poor and without fixed identity, is to live in a natural world where identity is not predicated on visual display, and garments, rather than signalling status, serve a prosaic function. Moreover, released from rational consciousness, patriarchal fixity and the tyranny of ocularcentrism, the individual is authentic. Flamineo's feigned madness also enables him to expose the love of money, the Machiavellian desire for power, religious hypocrisy and the effects of mercantilism, where

> knaves turne informers, as maggots turne to flies ... theres nothing so holie but mony will corrupt and putrifie it ... Noblemen are priviledged from the racke ... Religion ... is commeddled with policie. ... The first bloudshed in the world happened about religion.
>
> (20-3,33-4)

When Francisco sees his sister's ghost, however, he is not mad, nor is he feigning madness. Paradoxically it is because he desires vengeance for her death that Francisco succeeds in reconnecting with the other of the subconscious, the emotional and the creative. He "sees" the dead Isabella by invoking his subconscious:

> To fashion my revenge more seriously,
> Let me remember my dead sisters face:
> Call for her picture: no; I'le close mine eyes,
> And in a melancholicke thought I'le frame
> Her figure 'fore me.
> *Enter* Isabela's *Ghost.*
> Now I ha'te—d' foot how strong
> Imagination workes! how she can frame
> Things which are not! me thinks she stands afore me;
> And by the quicke Idea of my minde,
> Were my skill pregnant, I could draw her picture.
> Thought, as a subtile Jugler, makes us deeme
> Things supernaturall ... .
>
> (IV.i. 95-105)

What he reveals here is a paradox: it is from the feminine and its association with melancholy, inaction and creativity – both artistic and

reproductive – that Francisco draws his passion for revenge. Yet to avenge Isabella's death, he must re-establish his rational consciousness and expunge the vision. Depersonalizing Isabella by redefining her as object, he deliberately shifts back into his rational mode of consciousness so that he may act:

> remove this object:
> Out of my braine with't: what have I to do
> With tombes, or death-beds, funerals, or teares,
> That have to meditate upon revenge?
> So now 'tis ended, like an old wives story.
> States-men thinke often they see stranger sights
> Then mad-men. Come, to this waighty businesse.
>
> (IV.i. 109-115)

Hence, from the discourse of "old wives" and the mad, Francisco shifts to the "waighty business" of the masculine. Later, however, he reaffirms the power of feminine and the non-rational to undermine masculine self-restraint. After seeing Cornelia and a group of women preparing Marcello's corpse for burial, he reports to Flamineo:

> And there is such a solemne melodie
> 'Tweene dolefull songes, teares, and sad elegies:
> Such, as old grandames, watching by the dead,
> Were wont t'out-weare the nights with; that beleeve mee
> I had no eies to guide mee forth the roome,
> They were so ore-charg'd with water.
>
> (V.iv. 54-5)

Thus the sight of weeping women and the sound of music and poetry leashes both memory and rational control and brings about a shift in Francisco's consciousness; unable to see through his tears as he leaves the room, he is effectively blind.

In *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi,* weeping is an empathetic response to others' grief and functions, along with madness, in reorientating characters' perspectives and decomposing the artificial self. As Martin Jay points out, Derrida considered tears as "the most exalted kind of blindness", since

> only man knows how to go beyond seeing and knowing because only he knows how to cry ... Only he knows that tears are the essence of the eye – and not sight ... Revelatory blindness, apocalyptic blindess, that which reveals the very truth of the eyes, this would be the gaze veiled by tears.[30]

Bosola most eloquently expresses this when, weeping over the Duchess's corpse, he feels the pang of conscience, then remarks that it is "a Perspective / That showes us hell" (IV.ii.345-6). Likewise – invariably in relation to death – the sight of others' tears or the shedding of their own "blinds" characters to the sensory world and releases their capacity to see inwardly. Usually revealed at a private moment, remorse and compassion are shown, moreover, to require no ritual, priestly intervention, or on-stage witness to be authenticated or verified. Thus, where Webster critiques the function of ritual as ocularcentric and therefore no guide to the participants' interiority, he reveals a suspicion of institutionalized

30 Jay, p. 523.

forgiveness which is consistent with Shuger's point made about Calvinism:

> The relation between God and the soul becomes privatized, loosened from institutional and ecclesiastical moorings ... [and] penance does not require confession to either priest or congregation but instead only inward contrition.[31]

Hence the dying Brachiano's momentary contrition is independent of, and unaffected by, the inversion of the last unction. [32] Where his physical infirmity and disunity of language briefly cohere into the fixity and intensity of his gaze upon the crucifix, he weeps. Flamineo's comment, "See, see how firmely hee doth fixe his eye / Upon the Crucifix" (V.ii. 130), is matched by Vittoria's insistence that Brachianos's murderers "hold it constant./ It settles his wild spirits; and so his eies / Melt into teares" (V.iii. 131-3).

It is indirectly through Marcello's death that Flamineo experiences "a strange thing", so unfamiliar to him that he initially "cannot give [it] a name" (*WD* V.iv 107-8). Consistent with Erasmus's view that it is women, children and fools who are closest to the spiritual, it is his mother's grief which "Hath turn'd her child againe" (70), her deranged discourse and her grandmother's song, which enable Flamineo to realize that what he feels is "Compassion" (109). From the perspective of an unfamiliar mode of consciousness he then sees the truth of his fraudulent self:

> I have liv'd
>
> Riotously ill, like some that live in Court,

31 Shuger, p. 39.

32 The fact that the crucifix is held by murderers whose ritual is a blasphemous and parodic extreme unction does not, thereby, devalue the impact of the crucifix.

> And sometimes, when my face was full of smiles
> Have felt the mase of conscience in my brest.
> Oft gay and honour'd robes those tortures trie,
> ,, We thinke cag'd birds sing, when indeed they crie.
>
> (V.iv. 112-17)

Whereas in Cornelia's cosmology birds are free and permeated with the divine, here Flamineo's are imprisoned and weep for their pitiful state. Thus he acknowledges the torment of the self-fashioned subject who knows that his outward appearance is disjunctive with his authentic inner reality. And where his remarks are both self-referential and objective, he sees that ambition, self-dramatization, and status-signalling attire are both symptomatic and constitutive of inauthenticity.

Thus Flamineo's weeping alters his mode of consciousness and unlocks his awareness of conscience; then, on seeing Brachiano's ghost, he shifts from materialist, utilitarian concerns to the eschatological, asking him:

> In what place art thou? In yon starrie gallerie,
> Or in the cursed dungeon? No? not speake?
> Pray, Sir, resolve mee, what religions best
> For a man to die in? or is it in your knowledge
> To answere mee how long I have to live?
> That's the most necessairie question.
> Not answere?
>
> (V.iv. 120-6)

But Flamineo's requests are for knowledge that Brachiano does not give.

Flamineo's response, couched in Neoplatonic terms, is appropriate not to Brachiano the ghost, but to the insubstantial man he was in life. Where Brachiano was once "like some great men / That onely walke like shadowes up and downe", / And to no purpose " (V.iv. 126-8), he now, like the man who has emerged from the platonic cave, returns to the world of deceptive appearances as a "real" phantom. In his role as a "living" *memento mori* – a role enhanced by his carrying *"a pot of lilly-flowers with a scull int* " (117.03) – Brachiano *"throwes earth upon [Flamineo] and shews him the skull"* (128.01). This is a reminder not only of life's transience, but also of the otherness of the natural world to which the body will return.

When Flamineo faces death, however, he repudiates the knowledge he so urgently required of Brachiano; asked by Lodovico what he thinks, Flamineo replies:

> Nothing; of nothing: leave thy idle questions;
> I am ith way to study a long silence,
> To prate were idle; I remember nothing.
> Thers nothing of so infinit vexation
> As mans owne thoughts.
>
> (V.vi. 198-202)

This is not, as Jacqueline Pearson suggests, "total agnosticism",[33] but Flamineo's shedding of his constructed identity. In thus acknowledging the inconsequentiality of material being, Flamineo becomes open to "seeing"

33 Jacqueline Pearson, *Tragedy and tragicomedy in the plays of John Webster* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) pp. 80-1. It is important to remember that "agnosticism" is, in any case, an inappropriate term for the Renaissance.

with transcendent vision. And although he uses the vocabulary of the actor preparing for a role, Flamineo recognizes that, in death, there is no part to play – no role to study or lines to remember – and that the pursuit of knowledge is pointless. This is reiterated as he dies: "„While we looke up to heaven wee confound /„Knowledge with knowledge" (254-5). Even more important is Flamineo's admission: "O I am in a mist" (255). Whereas at one level, this affirms the Platonic-Augustinian view of subjective vision's limits, at another it is a declaration of Flamineo's spiritual state: mist, like tears, blinds the eyes and initiates a seeing from within. As a final repudiation of vision, it is paralleled by his statement: " I have cought / An everlasting could; I have lost my voice / Most irrecoverably" (264-6); acknowledging more than his imminent death, Flamineo is also saying that the drama in which he has played has come to an end. However, where death forever obliterates his actor's rhetorical skill, it also strips away his multi-layered, costumed persona and reveals his existential reality.

In the *Duchess of Malfi*, the correlation between pity and the capacity to weep is revealed when Bosola draws attention to Ferdinand's lack of contrition after the murder of the Duchess and her children. His callous remark – "The death / Of young Wolffes, is never to be pittied" (IV.ii.245-6) – when shown the children's bodies, prompts Bosola to ask: "Doe you not Weepe?" (247). Ferdinand then reveals his spiritual blindness; his eyes "dazell"(251). Later, his guilt manifested in madness, Ferdinand admits that his eyes are "cruell sore" (V.ii. 61). The projection of his anxieties about his loss of subjectivity and his bestialization through illicit lust becomes, in effect, inverted. He not only reclaims his metaphor for woman as wolf, but turns it inward. As the doctor reports, Ferdinand, when

discovered "Said he was a Woolffe: onely the difference / Was, a Woolffes skinne was hairy on the out-side, / His on the In-side" (V.ii.13-17). The connotations of the hair shirt and penance are clear: Ferdinand's madness is initiated by the "perspective" of his guilty conscience. Indeed, his appearance before the Doctor is an extraordinary performance in which he enacts a symbolic destruction of the false, or inauthentic self. Where the self-fashioned subject becomes, like Brachiano's representation, a "dead shadow" (*WD* II.ii.8), it is his real shadow that Ferdinand now attacks. Malateste's reminder that Ferdinand cannot be free of his shadow "if [he] move, and the Sun shine" (*DM* V.ii.35), mirrors Francisco's image in *The White Devil*, where the Promethean subject gazes upon the sun. Ferdinand, now "out of [his] Princely wits" (53) sees himself as the dead shadow, or simulacrum, that must be destroyed .

Where Ferdinand earlier remarks that he will "vault credit, and affect high pleasures, / Beyond death" (V.v. 67-8), he speaks egocentrically; but the further he falls from his elevated status as a Renaissance prince, the closer he comes to the essence of who he really is. As Bosola observes, it is when close to death that Ferdinand "seemes to come to himselfe, / Now he's so neere the bottom" (V.v. 68-9). It is then that Ferdinand no longer sees with "dazell[ed]" eyes: in admitting that his "fall" was caused by "ambition, blood, or lust" (71), and that "Like Diamonds, we are cut with our owne dust" (72), he begins to shows self-knowledge and a measure of contrition. Where once, in Bosola's words, Ferdinand "stood'st like a huge Piramid / Begun upon a large, and ample base", death reduces him to "[the] little point, a kind of nothing" ( 76-8), which, in Christian terms, is the true value of human endeavour.

Unlike her brother, the Duchess of Malfi does not go mad, but it is the "folly" of the mad which prepares her for death. Thus, in an ironic inversion of the cave analogy, her containment becomes her spiritual liberation and escape from the illusory and patriarchal world of shadows. Having experienced her brother's sadism, she recognizes that

> nothing but noyce, and folly
> Can keepe me in my right wits, whereas reason
> And silence, make me starke mad.
>
> (*DM* IV.ii. 5-7)

Indeed, sent by Ferdinand to present "masques of common Curtizans ... [to] sing, and daunce / And act their gambols to the full o'th'moone" (121-7), the madmen are free from the constraints of rational, humanist constructs of subjectivity, and their "folly" is the wisdom of parody. But what is important about this scene is that it is the Duchess's masculine subjectivity which is dismantled. Where, in *The White Devil*, Flamineo and Francisco see authentically, if briefly, through their contact with the feminine other, the Duchess is exposed, in a gender reversal, to participatory consciousness through madman/other. Insofar as the madmen's discourse subverts ocularcentrism and subjective vision, their song and dance is an absurd version of the Duchess's "revels" for which she was chided in I.i. Thus their madness helps to strip away the last vestiges of the Duchess's princely persona. Where, having seen the "corpses" of her children and Antonio she now thinks of "nothing" (V.ii. 15) and "sleepe[s]" (16) with her eyes open like "a mad-man" (17), she is ready to accept not-knowing, and repudiate her egocentric vision. When Bosola intervenes as

Bell-man and tomb-maker, the Duchess's public persona as "masculine" prince disintegrates until, when finally facing death, she achieves authenticity. From the "prince" who asks Cariola "Who do I looke like now" (IV.ii. 31), and who lapses into self-dramatization, suggesting that "Fortune seemes to have her eie-sight, / To behold [her]Tragedy" (36-7), she becomes the woman and mother who welcomes death as a release from what she has come to see as a prison.

Insofar as the last lines in the madman's song, "*We'll sing like swans, to welcome death, / and die in love and rest* " (IV ii. 71-2), instruct the Duchess how to die, they are a preamble to Bosola's function as the "*old man*" (107.02), "tombe-maker" (137), and "Bell-man" (160). The resignation and "rest" come with the repudiation of her public role as a prince, and her humble espousal of faith; after urging that her murderers "pull downe heaven upon [her]" (218), she has them wait while she kneels, since "heaven gates are not so highly arch'd / As Princes pallaces, they that enter there / Must go upon their knees" (219-21). Moreover, as she faces her murderers she requests that they "giv'st [her] little boy / Some sirrop, for his cold, and let the girle / Say her prayers, ere she sleepe" (IV.ii. 191-3). Where this concern for her children's physical and spiritual well-being recalls Isabella's love for Giovanni and Cornelia's for her children, it also confirms the Duchess's shift in consciousness away from patriarchal concerns.

Significantly, it is after he attempts to assuage the Duchess's grief at seeing the effigies of Antonio and her children that Bosola reaffirms the correlation between false identities and humanist rationalism. To Ferdinand's insistence that Bosola see the Duchess again, Bosola replies:

"Never in my owne shape, / That's forfeited by my intelligence" (IV.i.131-32). Thus, in Bosola's conceding that his rational mind is responsible for the forfeiture of his authentic being, Webster reveals his view of authenticity as the "essential" individual's capacity to love and feel compassion. This is confirmed when Bosola tells Ferdinand that "when you send me [ to the Duchess] next,/ The businesse shalbe comfort" (IV.i. 133-4). Clearly, Lucas is wrong in suggesting that Bosola's remark to the Duchess, "Looke you, the Starres shine still" (IV.i.98), is evidence of Bosola's "cynicism". [34] Rather, this remark must be seen as revealing the compassionate, hence real, Bosola; when seen in relation to how, in *The White Devil,* Flamineo is also moved by a woman's suffering, it confirms Webster's view of the masculine reunion with the other as an affirmation of Christian *caritas*. Indeed when Bosola tells the Duchess to "Remember / [She is]a Christian (IV.i.73-4) and to "Leave this vaine sorrow" (75), he alludes to Christian prohibitions on vanity and despair. Furthermore, when urging Ferdinand to stop torturing his sister, he also requests that she be given spiritual aids:

> 'Faith, end here;
> And go no further in your cruelty:
> Send her a penetentiall garment, to put on,
> Next to her delicate skinne, and furnish her
> With beades, and prayer bookes.
>
> (114-118)

When Bosola speaks of the "cruell lie" (133) perpetrated against the

34 See *Works,* p. 641.

Duchess, he refers to what Ferdinand terms the "Art" (109) of representation as expressed by "*Vincentio Lauriola*" (112), the maker of wax effigies. By implication he also refers to the art of the actor; by further implication Bosola is thus complicit in the "apotheosis of the visual" and moral relativism. Where, as I show above, his railing against the old midwife is evidence of his self-disgust, his dying words are the ultimate repudiation of the falsity of his role-playing and an assertion of his intrinsic goodness: if he "was an Actor in the maine of all" (V.v. 83), it was "Much 'gainst [his] owne good nature" ( 84).

Like Flamineo, Bosola dies "In a mist" (V.v.93), accepting his epistemological limitations. Whether he refers specifically to his accidental killing of Antonio, or more compellingly, to the whole of human existence, he does not "know ... how, / Such a mistake, as I have often seene / In a play" (93-95). And in a recapitulation of his speech to the Duchess he observes that

> We are onely like dead wals, or vaulted graves,
> That ruin'd, yeildes no eccho:
> .....
> Oh this gloomy world,
> In what shadow, or deepe pit of darknesse,
> Doth (womanish, and fearefull) mankind live?
> (96-101)

When placed in the context of Bosola's compassion for the Duchess, and the broader context of both tragedies, this last line is ambiguous. Whereas at one level Bosola reaffirms his misogyny, on another he unconsciously

reveals that the repressed other has insight into the truth of life's illusion and mystery. Thus the authentic Bosola sees two worlds: the illusory world of appearances and that of transcendent truth. And when the Duchess asks "Who am I?" (IV.ii. 115), his reply has an unmistakably Platonic bias:

> Thou art a box of worme-seed, at best, but a salvatory of greene mummey: what's this flesh? A little cruded milke, phantasticall puffe-paste: our bodies are weaker then those paper prisons boyes use to keepe flies in: more contemptible, since ours is to preserve earth-wormes. Didst thou ever see a larke in a cage? Such is the soule in the body: this world is like her little turfe of grasse, an the Heaven ore our heads, like her looking glasse, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the compasse of our small prison.
>
> (IV.ii. 116-123)

When the Duchess faces Bosola as her tomb-maker, and defiantly proclaims that she is the "Duchesse of *Malfy* still" (IV.ii.131), she reasserts the public persona which had little patience with Cariola's "superstition", or "ould wives tradition". Appropriately, this initiates an exchange in which Bosola encapsulates all that Webster posits as the ontological crisis of Renaissance subjectivity. Bosola, speaking of the relativism of sensory experience, reminds the Duchess that "Glories (like glowe-wormes) a farre off, shine bright, / "But look'd to neere, have neither heate, nor light" (IV.ii. 133-4). What follows is his elaboration on the secularization of the Renaissance subject, culminating in his image of Renaissance "Princes" averting their eyes from heaven:

> *Dutchess*. And thou com'st to make my tombe?

*Bosola.* Yes.

*Dutchesse.* Let me be a little merry, of what stuffe wilt thou make it?

*Bosola.* Nay, resolve me first, of what fashion?

*Dutchesse.* Why, do we grow phantasticall in our death-bed? Do we affect fashion in the grave?

*Bosola.* Most ambitiously: Princes images on their tombes, do not lie, as they were wont, seeming to pray up to heaven: but with their hands under their cheekes, (as if they died of the tooth-ache) they are not carved with their eies fix'd upon the starres; but as their minds were wholy bent upon the world, the selfe-same way, they seeme to turne their faces.

(IV.ii. 138-149)

If here the subjects of whom Bosola speaks are simulacra, this is the legacy of humanist subjectivity; they are, like Holbein's ambassadors, fashioned as aesthetic objects or inauthentic, "dead" representations of themselves. But, ironically, if they record "the triumph of the simulacr[a] over what [they purport] to represent", [35] they also function as the *memento mori* which as subjects they do not see.

35 Jay, p.543.

# CONCLUSION

I began this thesis with a commentary on Holbein's *The Ambassadors,* and referred to it again in the closing lines of my last chapter. There, as in the Introduction, I suggested that Holbein's representation of the humanist subject as an aesthetic "dead" object is a paradigm which informs Webster's *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi.* Hence, if there is a common thread which runs through my thesis, from the Introduction to this, the Conclusion, it is the representation of the Renaissance humanist subject as the symbol of an ideology. Thus I have shown him, in Websterian terms, as void food, a painter's subject, an aestheticized façade, a simulacrum, and a marble effigy. In a sense I have colluded in what Webster condemns: I have created the image of an image, in much the way that Monticelso represents Vittoria as the devil's representation in portraiture.

But, as I have argued in this thesis, Webster's purpose is didactic: he shows the ontological crisis of the ideologically constructed subject who sees himself as promethean and differentiated from the world "out there" and immured behind Alberti's shatterproof glass while he is, in reality, passionate and desiring. Where this is revealed as a Machiavellian drive for self-aggrandizement and power, he is libidinous, vengeful, violent, and deeply misogynous. Thus I have shown that counterbalancing the references in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* to the subject as ontologically empty and iconically fixed, are those in which he is

represented as bestial and elemental. In this I argue that Webster is a proto-Freudian who sees the projection of the other as the spilling over of repressed and anti-social desires. I have also shown that Webster has a Platonic-Augustinian suspicion of subjective vision as promoting ethical relativism and the collapse of a moral centre.

But since Webster, as a playwright, produces his own subjective visions of the courts of Rome and Malfi, is he not responsible for producing visual art's equivalent of *trompe l'oeil* ? Does he not "[plague us] in Art" (*DM* IV.i.119) and compell us to "to see through a glass darkly"? or worse seduce us into indulging in ocular concupiscence? Indeed when viewed through an Augustinian lens, Webster's tragedies seem to prefigure post-modernism's apotheosis of the visual. As Augustine wrote:

> What pleasure can there be in the sight of a mangled corpse, which can only horrify? Yet people will flock to see one lying on the ground, simply for the sensation of sorrow and horror that it gives them.[1]

Why then, with his Platonic-Augustinian bias did Webster not share Calvin's hostility to "the hypertrophy of the visual", [2] and join those who smashed icons, and closed theatres? The answer to this paradox lies in Webster's didacticism. The horror invoked at seeing "mangled corpses" is part of his dialectic of shifting perspectives through which the viewing audience is challenged to see his truth: that the desire which drives human beings – the highest form of Eros – is their authentic essence and the source of all otherness, including art. What Webster is saying is that, if

1 *Confessions*, Book X.35, p. 242.

2 Jay, p.43

the visual is more powerful than the aural, it must not be used wantonly or gratuitously. Thus just as individuals are not heroically free to exploit and shape either themselves or the universe to their own rationalist secular ends, neither is the artist free to satisfy his own need for self-gratification. Whether painter or playwright, the artist's task is to use the visual not to mask, but reveal truth. *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* thus serve the Platonic purpose of enabling the audience to see not *with,* but *through* the eyes. That truth, in Websterian terms, is found in the assertion of authentic being whose *telos* is spiritual.

As Sidney suggests in his *Defence of Poesie*, poetry should move as well as teach:

> Poesy ... is an art of imitation ... that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture; with this end, to teach and delight. [3]

Just as Webster uses sign, ritual and metaphor as the intermediaries which bridge the chasm between the material and the spiritual, so he upholds the intercessionary practice of theatre, positioned as it is between the individual and the world, to bridge the gap of alienation and bring the "delight" of experiencing participatory consciousness. In short, what Webster offers is the reunification with the other. Thus it seems appropriate that, in giving *The Ambassadors* a backward glance, I cite Greenblatt's words, albeit substituting "Webster" for "Holbein":

> [Webster] fuses a radical questioning of the status of the world with a radical

3 Hollander and Kermode, p.139.

> questioning of the status of art. For [his tragedies insist], passionately and profoundly, on the representational power of art, its central role in man's apprehension and control of reality, even as it insists, with uncanny persuasiveness, on the fictional character of that entire so-called reality and the art that pretends to represent it. 4

George Levine states: "[p]art of the value of the aesthetic is in the way it can provide spaces and strategies for exploring the possibility of conciliations between the idiosyncratic and the communal".5 He also suggests that the antihumanist argument against the notion of self is too limited since " [t]he location of authority in subjectivity is not necessarily a hidden agenda of authority, but often a quite overt effort to create a subjectivity that is committed to the collective". 6 Thus it seems to me that Webster still has something very simple, but important to say, and it is that without the "conciliations between the idiosyncratic and the communal" we become, like Ferdinand in the *Duchess of Malfi,* alone, and tormentedly trying to destroy our own shadows.

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4 Greenblatt, 1980, p.21.

5 George Levine, "Reclaiming the Aesthetic", *Aesthetics and Ideology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994) pp. 19-20.

6 Ibid., p.20.

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